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SIR RUSTY SWORD

A Novel

by

PHILIP LINDSAY

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DEDICATION

FOR

NORMAN LINDSAY

DEAR DAD,

Probably you will have forgotten our talk, many years ago in Hampstead, about the heroism of John Fox. His adventure as recounted in Richard Hakluyt's mighty garner, The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation Made by Sea or Over-land to the Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at any time within the compasse of these 1,600 Yeares, *thrilled me then as it thrills me now. Some modern historians, like Theodore Maynard* (Queen Elizabeth [*Hollis and Carter*] 1943), *might sneer at Elizabethan seamen, the physical expression of adventure of which Marlowe and Shakespeare were the spiritual laureates, calling them valiant only* when they had defenceless towns to sack, *but they remain to us as imperishable symbols. I don't doubt that sailors to-day remember Drake and can hear his drums in the thunder of the guns in such battles as the Plate. Not consciously perhaps do they associate themselves with the navy's glorious past—for the hero is rarely conscious of heroism until the fight is finished—but the Elizabethan spirit yet lives, it still excites to adventure, is still smelt in the sea-winds of the Channel. No arm-chair smugness in a library can rob that spirit of its glory. Those men were pirates, yea: but they were national pirates, and often, like rich-vocabularied Grenville—Maynard's* violent ruffian—*felt themselves crusaders, saints in armour, in their little ships. We do not need the Protestant exultation of a Froude to love them and to reverence them: we need merely to have English blood in us. And as for their fighting only defenceless towns, was Cadiz defenceless to the ships of Drake? and did the treasure fleets sail unescorted? It is true that these American armadas were never captured, but that was not the pirates' fault: they were ever snuffling fearlessly after them.*

But this is no place to argue with barking critics at the heels of Drake and Hawkins, this tale has naught to do with those great men, it but gives the story of one of the lesser-known Elizabethans whose narrative is pressed into only a few pages of Hakluyt: The voyage of John Foxe, to the Streit of Gibraltar, in a ship called The three halfe-moones, Anno 1563. And his worthy enterprize in delivering 266 Christians from the captivitie of the Turkes at Alexandria, Anno 1577. *My story deals with that escape, not with the voyage, and only those passages touching the escape itself are historical, all characters, apart from Fox and Peter Unticaro—William Wickney and Robert Moore being, alas! but names in Hakluyt—are fictional. It is a sad necessity for the historical novelist to have to weave fiction into history, but he has no alternative if he would tell a story; and should excuse be*

needed, he has only to turn to the colourful masterpieces of Scott, where history was sometimes woefully disturbed as in The Talisman, Peveril of the Peak *and* Ivanhoe, *for full justification, for Scott remains not merely the first but the greatest of all costume novelists. Yet never wilfully have I transgressed the truth: I have but tried to build a story around the facts, leaving them undisturbed. And I must thank you, Norman, for first introducing me to Scott. I will never forget that morning at Springwood when you forced into my stupidly reluctant hands your copy of* Ivanhoe, *for I had a boyish prejudice against one whose* Marmion *and* Lady of the Lake *I had grown to detest, ill-digesting them when they were rattled into me at school.*

But that morning opened a world that dazzled me and dazzles me to this day, the noisy human world of Scott, of boastful swashbucklers and canting, ranting men of God and law and commerce. And for that reason alone your name should stand before every word I have written; but there are many other reasons, apart from the lucky accident of being your son, for which I am grateful to the gods. Those Springwood days and nights remain like dawn in my memory. It is always with joy I remember sitting by your wood-fire, stealing innumerable cigarettes, and listening enchanted while you discoursed of everything from the protoplasm to Shakespeare and Beethoven, your unframed canvases tacked skew-whiff on the walls, the round table—nobly, aptly round—heaped with your water-colours, your etchings, your pen-and-ink drawings, your pencil sketches. In that studio was I spiritually born, as my body was born in your home at Lavendar Bay.

But to Fox—or to Foxe, as Hakluyt, with his Elizabethan contempt for crabbed exactitude, spells his name occasionally—whose escape is here recounted: I am glad to say that in the yeere of our Lorde God, 1579, *he reached England,* went unto the Court, and shewed all his travell unto the Councell: who considering of the state of this man, in that hee had spent and lost a great part of his youth in thraldome and bondage, extended to him their liberalitie, to helpe to maintaine him now in age, to their right honour, and to the incouragement of all true hearted Christians. . . . *Yet what can I tell you of Fox that you do not already know? I only wish that I now possessed your sketches of ships and guns and rigging and all the notes you so kindly wrote for me on seamanship, for those are subjects of which you are the initiate and I not even a neophyte, lumbering outside my well-thumbed pages of Captain John Smith and Falconer. For I did not write Fox's story when I had you at my elbow. I made but a rough version which was, quite rightly, discarded, for it was very bad. But the idea has simmered in me ever since until to-day I return to it, and I hope you do not find my details too inaccurate. I have striven hard to be accurate and have read every available book on the Turks of those days, but one's reading is limited in war-time, with so many libraries shut, so many rare books hidden from possible bombing. I can merely ask your tolerance for any mistakes—and that I have never asked in vain. Here is the book, with love and gratitude. . . . I dread to hear your verdict.*

Lincoln. PHILIP LINDSAY.

CHAPTER I

PREY FOR PIRATES

THERE was no escape for the *Little Jesus*. Becalmed in this glare of blue sea, with no whisper of wind out of the greyish sky, she lay as if yoked to the unbroken waters of the Mediterranean. Sails drooped on the yards like dried skin and the pitch was hot and wet in the seams. Helpless, she lay while the pirate galleys heaved over the horizon, their oars lifting, falling, centipede-like legs swaying them close to the unmoving English victim. Low ruffs of foam stirred by the dipping blades were the only movement, it seemed, on that dark sea. The *Little Jesus* waited as if bewitched, as if damned, while her crew leaned on the bulwarks, watching silently, white-faced and steady-fingered. There was nothing further for them to do. All was prepared for battle: cannon loaded, water-buckets filled, the slow-matches burning over them, while powder-kegs stood by pyramids of black shot. A pavasse, painted with multiple crosses of St. George, had been roped over the bulwarks to hold back boarders. There was nothing to do now but to wait and stamp your feet, to grin at your mates and flex the muscles in your legs to stop them trembling. Even the bravest could feel those muscles turn cowards, could feel them twitch impatiently at this seemingly endless wait for possible death. Guns and pistols were cocked, powder dry in the shut pans, swords were unsheathed and spat back the sunlight in flickering silver.

"Friends," said the master, standing unhatted on the poop, "it is time for prayer, for our time may be short. In the hands of God this day lie not only our souls but our sinful bodies and my ship's cargo. Let us pray God for the strength of David or Samson against these infidels. Only with the Lord's help can we conquer, for we are outnumbered beyond numbering. But let not your stomachs fall at that. We can have no mightier ally than God and this ship is God's ship in honour and love of His Son, while they have but their foolish Allah and his cheat Mohammed to shield them. Take heart then, fellows, and pray that we be not forgotten this day in heaven."

This master, Francis Leland, was a young man, yet at his words, the sailors turned to him like children to their father. They stared up from the ship's waist, and as he bowed his head and went on his knees, his captain, old Gabriel Crouch, beside him; the crew knelt, unhatted and uncapped, on the hot deck and stared between their fingers at the polished golden boards ribbed with pitch.

In silence, all prayed while the pirate galleys grew out of hot mists that blurred them, shimmered about them as if they were dragons smoking to revenge the St. George on the flag. No longer did the

English watch their approach, their thoughts now being set on God to whom they turned as to a comrade Who had never yet failed them in extremity. Had He not placed a virgin on their throne—symbol of His own mother-bride-and-daughter——? and with virginity could not even unicorns and dragons be tamed to fawning spaniels? and had He not endowed the English with such spiritual strength that they—they said it themselves—could never be beaten?

Could never be beaten, whispered Francis Leland behind his hand, striving to settle his obstinate thoughts on God, but being owner as well as master of this ship, the carnal mind would not obey his will. It kept nagging with fears, tap-tap-tapping behind his prayer, not with fears of the coming fight but with the more than possible loss of ship and goods. The crew could wet their lips with expectation of bloody battle, of plunder and great slaughter of pagans for hell, but he had responsibilities that kept stinging in him. He must not lose his ship, dear God; he must not, must not lose his *Little Jesus*. If but the faintest wind would blow, if only God would puff a little, Francis would have thrilled at thought of sending those damned dark souls to their devil Mohammed, for he feared no man when he gripped a sword and called on God for strength. And if a wind should come, he did not doubt that he could beat off a thousand pirates. . . . But in this satanic calm, this breathless oven, he must wait as if in an unwalled castle, unable to turn, unable to aim his guns properly or to dodge the iron beaks that soon would strike his timbers.

"I told you," muttered old Crouch beside him, "I warned you;" and Francis started as if God Himself had suddenly answered his thoughts.

But it was only Crouch, old ever-grumbling Crouch, treating him, as usual, like a babe because he was over twice his age and had been his father's comrade.

"I gave you fair warning," he said, "God always has hated a sabbath-breaker. That's one of His own commandments which He writ for Moses, and what's a sailor to go in the face of Moses, not to speak of God? I told you, lad, I gave fair warning what to expect."

Sighing, Francis stood to his feet, almost glad to argue that he might turn from his fears.

"Even you, Gab," he said, "are no better Christian than I; so, quiet! or you'll have my father's ghost a-haunting you, for he's the one you're squabbling with: not me. He reared me, taught me my faith."

"Another of God's best commandments gone smash-o!" muttered Crouch, groaning and running his sword-blade between his fingers while he eyed the approaching Turks. "Not only sabbath-busting but maligning your own dad, and he as good a Christian as ever sailed with Hawkins, and there's no fiercer man than Captain Hawkins

when it comes to our Lord. He'd wear your knees to blood, lad, if you sailed with him, he'd have you praying that often. Yea, he'd soon peel the skin off you for busting God's own Sunday and speaking disrespectful of your dad."

The old, old quarrel! ever since they'd sailed out of Plymouth, this same quarrel!

"I left on Sunday," said Francis, "because the tide was on the turn and the wind steady. And you know it."

"I know you're damned," said Crouch complacently. "I should have stopped you, and I know what your dad'll tell me when we meet; and that's not going to be so long, it seems, for we'll both be dead 'ums soon with those hell-hounds racing at us and God turning His back because of you. You're only a baby for all your smirk and your sword and your beard."

Francis turned away, for he did not wish to quarrel and he could feel his anger, fretted by this calm, wrinkling under his skin.

He shouted suddenly:

"Aren't they in range yet, gunner?"

"No," said Crouch.

"Not yet, cap'n," said the gunner, sighting a cannon.

"Just what I told you," said Crouch. "Don't be impatient, boy."

Slowly the galleys grew out of the shimmering heat. They seemed, at first, like beetles, tiny and harmless, crinkling the blue with thin little legs. If only they would come yarely, yarely, and let the maddened spirit in his flesh, quivering from inaction, use this sword in his wet fingers! . . . Hurry, hurry! . . . But they did not hurry, those enemy galleys, they did not seem to move while Francis watched, but he had only to turn aside, then to turn back to the lee-rail, and they had become larger, thank God! their masts lifting into the sky, their long metal prows gleaming, their oars growing separate in the flurry of foam. Through his spyglass, he could see the bright-massed warriors, their curved bows ready for shooting, their scimitars bright as glass. He could see even the gunners holding slowmatches, even the grey tremble of smoke rising from those matches' scarlet tips. The galleys were as silent as his own *Little Jesus*, the only movement from them being the rhythmic sway of the banks of semi-naked rowers chained leg and wrist, five to an oar. The lateen yards were lowered and the sails brailed up, and on the poop of each, the *reis*, or captain, sat amongst helmed or turbaned knights under a gaudy canopy.

"They're going to surround us," said Crouch unctuously, as if delighted: "the damned hell-hounds."

The enemy was breaking its formation, the galleys were slowly fanning out, those in the centre resting on their oars while two others circled outwards, one to take the *Jesus* bows on, the other to circle her stern. Francis bit his lip as he watched, and the blood trickled into his beard. He was enraged to find that his hands were

shaking when they loosed their grip on the taffrail. It was not fear, he told himself, that made them shake : it was exasperation at his own helplessness. Here must he stay unmoving and watch his own destruction being spun about him. Dear God! but a little wind! a puff, a whisper of wind! But there was not a shiver out of the fat clouds, not a feather of foam on the shining blue sea. The heat was stifling and he sweated under his steel, for he had a plate on breast and back and a sickle-brimmed pointed morion on his head. Otherwise he was unarmoured, his fat breeches puffed around his hips were of green velvet, his armless jerkin of leather, while his boots over the green hose reached to above his knees. He did not need armour that imprisoned one's strength, steel-jointing one's agility and making one awkward and easily killed in a mêlée. On the confined space of a ship with a multitude of murderous enemies about to swarm aboard, one needed to be quick-eyed and alert of limb if one did not wish to be caught like an up-ended beetle.

"What do you make of the range?" he asked and was surprised to hear how calm, how ordinary sounded his voice. "Six thousand paces?"

"Ay," muttered the gunner, crouching beside his piece and screwing up one eye as he sighted the foe. "Six, and over. We must try our luck when they come within three thousand. I know them galleys: they carry twenty-pounders with a point-blank range of a hundred and eighty paces. What can our ten- and fifteen-pounders do against that, eh?"

"But we have the long-distance range of them, for all that. Their heavy shot can't carry three thousand paces."

"Ay," grinned the gunner; "and at three thousand we get a target like a water-beetle to aim at!"

For all his grumbling, the gunner continued to squint towards the galleys, estimating their distance away. Steadily they approached, knowing that the *Jesus's* basilisks could out-range them but trusting to make the dash that would bring their heavier guns into point-blank range. Walking stiffly, tensely, the English fidgeted about their guns, turning with childlike impatience towards the quarterdeck until, at last, the order came.

"You, Robin," cried Francis, "and you, Wicklow, try the range of her. Fire by the rim, for they're over the three thousand."

The red-tipped smoking match was dabbed into a touch-hole, the grey ash, fully an inch of it, crumbling on the metal, and as if stung to life, the cannon bounced against its tackling, throwing up its muzzle, when it roared.

Other cannon roared with it, cannon upon cannon, roaring, spitting huge balls in a blaze of fire and heavy stinking smoke, cannon upon cannon, roaring and up-ending the ship that groaned as her masts dipped towards the sea and as she righted herself, shaking and trembling while the last cannon roared and spat its metal in flame.

Smoke for a moment blurred Francis's vision, as if he had sailed into the midst of a dirty cloud, then as it cleared, he saw the leading galley rear like a kicked beast. Her metal prow, beaten to a lion's head, lifted its snout and, far from her though he was, Francis heard distinctly the snarl and scream of cracking timbers, then the wail of the hurt as the galley heeled over. Slaves were shrieking to be unlocked from their benches so that they might swim and possibly be saved, but the Moslems, their masters, took no heed. They leaped about the doomed vessel, swarming over the bulwarks, and their bald or turbaned heads spattered the water darkly, as if with ink, blots on the blue. Some clung to broken spars and oars and other timber, while the nearest galley backed water and flung out ropes. The slaves were bobbing up and down, seeming to bounce in the sinking galley, screaming while they tugged impotently at their chains as the water lipped up their legs. Then suddenly the galley plunged: she flung up her prow as if to punch at heaven, then dived backwards and then down, and the living slaves went with her. Abruptly their howling ceased and all was quiet.

"They were Christians like us once," said Crouch. "And now they're mermaid-meat, the lot of them."

"The Lord have mercy on them," whispered Francis, licking his lips.

"Mermaid-meat, poor Christian flesh. . . ." Crouch nodded sagely and turned his bright old eyes on Francis. "You've not been far enough at sea to know that," he said scornfully; "all you know's the Channel and this fishpond. But I've sailed with Hawkins and I've seen the merfolk. Yea, I've seen them with these very eyes. The bitches kiss a man to death, they kiss and crunch him to death, lovingsomely, and then when they find what they've done to the poor fellow, they weep and blubber at it. Just like females on land, 'cept for their tails, and even that might not be so different, for how do we know what most women have under their petticoats? They eat only a fellow's eyes, and his tongue, and his nose, and his toes, and the tips of his fingers and his privies. For such be dainties to those scaly sluts. . . ."

Francis was not listening. He had heard Crouch's wondrous stories too often in the past to listen to them now, in this anxious moment. He was squinting against the sun, awaiting the opportunity to shoot again. As he could not sail in this calm, he could but trust in God to bring a galley into range. But the pagans were cunning, being devils, careful to keep their slim prows, narrow targets at this distance, facing him.

"They've got blue hair," said Crouch. "At least, it looked like hair, being all slimy and weedy when I saw it. She came swimming, bold as a Dutch trollop, at me near the Indies, grinning cheerful she was, just like a woman ogling for a bed. She'd a woman's face, eyes, nose, mouth, chin, ears, neck and forehead, and a woman's

belly and bubs and arms, but her tail was just like a porpoise's, or a mackerel's, all speckled-like. . . ."

One of the galleys darted ahead of the others, getting very close, and Francis dropped his arm to the gunner. This time the lower tiers flared and roared and spat their balls, swinging the *Little Jesus* over as if she had been hit in a sudden squall. The main batteries were still cooling, the men reloading. Francis glared through his spyglass from galley to galley, but none seemed seriously hurt. He saw one iron ball scud merrily over the water, bouncing until, suddenly, it sank.

"Near thing," said Crouch. "That dragon fellow ought to have got his . . . I bet those mermaids I was telling you of are biting their hair, the bitches. I was telling you. . . . That one I saw. She came a pike's length up to me where I sat in my boat. Fishing, I was. Well, thought I, this must be a mermaid, never having seen one afore, but knowing how venerous and desirous of us humans they be, and how dangerous, I plugged my ears with my fingers, for they sing sweet, I'm told, to lull you to sleep so that they can have their dirty fill of you. For they swim with you to a dry spot, water being too soft-like for bedding, and like a scorpion, they eat you all up, just . . . Ow!" He leaped aside as the galleys answered their fire.

"Down, Frankie, down!" he cried.

But Francis did not move. He was not afraid because he did did not think to fear. Unaware for the moment of his body and the possibility of body's death, he watched the enemy, tense, hoping for a lick of wind that would give him the chance to act, watching the chance to shoot without wasting shot.

"Fire by the hollow, right against the mark, lads!" he cried.

Whenever the least chance offered, he dropped his arm to the head gunner, and the guns roared. Smoke hid the enemy in drifting patches. Above him, Francis heard the crack of wood giving as the upper yards on the mainstay snapped, struck by enemy fire, and splinters flew, ricocheting from deck to deck, slashing at the men, breaking bones, gouging flesh. His ship shuddered and rolled as her guns answered the galleys. Water fountained as if whales sported when balls plunged down. Arrows rained darkly. One thudded against Francis's morion and he shook himself with sudden fear, thinking he was hit.

The musicians played beside him, for he had bade them strike up some old English song to give the men courage in dreams. Trumpet, drum and flute played merrily like birds in a storm, while the sailors slid over the sanded deck. Naked to the waist, the men snarled, sweating, as they laboured at the guns, cleaning, loading, swinging the muzzles through open ports. Powder-monkeys scurried up from below-decks, bent with the weight of ammunition, coughing in the stinking whorls of sulphurous smoke. No second now for

a breathing-space, no time for talk except to curse. Some tumbled, wounded, dying or dead, and were hurled from bulwark to bulwark as the guns roared and heeled back the ship, guns wrenching and rearing at their breechings like animals in nets. Some wounded managed to crawl or stagger to the companion-way to tumble below where the surgeon waited, as bright with blood as a butcher.

Smoke split with jagged red, smoke that seemed to knot itself inside your chest, to throttle you with coughing, smoke that scorched your eyes and stung your hands when burnt powder fell. Hot wads gleamed on the sails. Slow-matches burned calmly, tipped as if with rubies, placed over the water-buckets so that they could do no harm should they fall. At last, the *Jesus* was moving. It seemed to Francis that she sailed, but the guggle of water, the strain of timbers, the creak of ropes and flap of sail were not because of wind, but because of the guns rocking and bouncing.

Always, when smoke cleared momentarily, he saw the galleys creeping close. After that first lucky shot, his gunners had not hit a galley broadside on. They had but broken a few masts and pulped some rowers, snapped some oars. The galleys drew closer. They had but few guns, luckily, and those only on the prow, but they shot their arrows unceasingly and the decks of the *Little Jesus* bristled with shafts as if they sprouted little branches.

Francis leaned over the bulwarks, blinking and brushing away the smoke, wellnigh deafened with the guns. He caught his breath to see one galley lurch over, her oars crack-crackling when heavy chain-shot twisted on them, flinging the slaves high in the air to be jerked back by their manacles. Yet still the damned crippled ship came on. Another caught alight—for his gunners were using fireshells as well as balls—she burst into scarlet under rolling grey-black smoke. Soldiers leaped on the flames, beating them out with wet sails and cloaks, and, with charred prow, she came on.

Then one shot went home, raked the midmost galley from stem to stern, smashing the sternpost and disabling the tiller. Another hit her just above the water-line and she took the sea heavily by the inrush of her bow-wave. Useless now the oars, upflung, twisting on other oars, knocking rower over rower, binding them in their own chains. Slowly sideways she drifted until a salvo caught her clean amidships, then gradually she sank, sagging on to the waters that lipped into her, filling her rapidly. The crew fought amongst themselves as they struggled to get free from the wreckage, the twisting tripping ropes, and dived overboard while the nearest galley backed water and tossed lines for them to catch.

But the other galleys did not pause, they came direct to the waiting *Jesus*. Now they were well within point-blank range and their heavy shot took terrible effect, for they fired high to disable the *Jesus*, one shot crashing into the poop-quarter, splintering its carved woodwork, while another slashed through the mizzen lateen-yard

above the parral and down it came, tearing, screaming as it ripped the sail in half.

Feebly, at last, came a languid puff of wind astern, sufficient however to stretch the sails and the *Jesus* lopped forward, too late. Scarcely had she moved, trembling as though eager to escape, than a twenty-pound ball caught her foremast, just below the hounds. Almost knocked from his feet, Francis glared up and saw the topmast stagger, swayed back by the pull of the backstays. For a moment, a moment that seem anguished eternity, it hung, but the strain was too great for the bobstay. The bobstay parted and the bowsprit snapped off short abaft the forestay collar, while the pull of the wind in her foretopsail tugged the topmast in a sweeping, rushing curve downward. The foreyard parrel gave and the whole white bulging mass of sails and splintering spars crashed down over the bows, smashing the forecastle-rail and smothering the guns at the fore-ports.

Helplessly, entangled in her own sails and rigging, the *Jesus* trembled a little but stayed still while the guns in the waist yet fired on the galleys closing in, and all the small-arms spat from the bows. But steadily the galleys came, the oars steadily rising, falling, as the overseers whipped the naked backs.

"Ready, men!" shouted Francis, his voice hoarse because his throat was burnt with powder-fumes. "Repel boarders!"

As he spoke, one iron-tipped prow crunched on the *Little Jesus*, pounding her amidships, splintering the four-inch oak timbers, and through the mists of powder, he saw the dazzle of armour, saw dusky faces under gay turbans and high helmets, heard the terrifying Moslem battle-cry rise, animal-sounding, above the uproar—*Allah il-Allah!*—as grappling-irons were flung and the Turks ran out along their straight prow and leaped into the main-chains, slashing from the shrouds at the men in the waist, and swinging off the shrouds on to the deck.

Francis swung his sword at a beaked face showing over the pavasse.

"God for merry England!" he cried.

Again, the *Little Jesus* lurched as another galley crunched against her, the carved prow rearing over the bulwarks like a serpent out of the sea. And now more Moslems came, uncountable howling bearded Moslems, leaping to the decks, and entering by the forecastle fore-ports and alleyway doors, driving the forecastle gunners out into the waist.

They came from everywhere, it seemed, and sudden madness blinded Francis and shook him. He sobbed to see these devils on his ship and sprang amongst them, reckless of wounds or death, to seek revenge for such sacrilege. Black devils on the *Jesus*. Their smoky faces split with white teeth, white eyes glaring, they were on all sides, plumed helmets and steel-topped turbans, bright cloaks

and womanly kirtles. He did not care if he should die; indeed, he almost wished to die, because his ship was lost. And with her loss, life had small meaning. And all because God had held back the winds! God had betrayed him!

He leaped down to the maindeck and swung his sword at a black giant and the blow on bone jarred to his elbow as the blade sliced the turban. Lugging it free in almost the same gesture as with which he had struck, he swung again at a lean rascal, caught him on the neck and tumbled him, shrieking, back.

Once more the *Little Jesus* shuddered as another galley pounded her sides and further blackamoors, slashing down the pavasse, tumbled on to the deck like monkeys from a tree. Hundreds of them, damn them, when there were barely a dozen English left standing to fight. Yet not one thought of surrender. Francis saw Crouch beside him. The old man's face was purple and sweating yet his eyes were like ice in sunlight; the long grey beard was dabbled with red as if he had drunk blood; his morion was gone and the thin hair brushed back and forwards over his baldness with the rhythm of his blows; and to his amazement, Francis laughed and shouted:

"Careful! or the mermaids'll get you!"

Crouch panted, "Guard your right, you fool, guard your right!"

Francis swung round in time to stab in the paunch a fat rogue who had lifted himself on his toes to bring down an axe with all his body's weight. Brown and black turbaned faces drifted about him in smoke as he pressed against the break of the quarterdeck. It was madness to fight, they were doomed, yet they fought.

Then he heard his boatswain shout, "Christ, they're behind us!" and he turned swiftly just as a tall Moslem leaped on his back and sent him sprawling. Even on the deck, he tried to struggle, punching at legs, until somebody hit him with him the flat of a sword. He saw in a moment's frenzied horror the bright blade oily with blood swoop on him and he felt his skull jar so that he snapped his teeth together as pain swooped on him in red-shot darkness.

CHAPTER II

THEIR SHIP THEIR JAIL

FRANCIS LELAND awoke, but he was not in his bed, he was on a deck below, and he felt sick. It was as if he had been drunk on sailors' tipple, and for a dazed moment he thought himself in Plymouth or some foreign port, but even while he wondered where he was, he remembered and groaned and tried to forget, shutting his eyes so tightly that they hurt. Captured, a slave for the bagnios of the East, to be put on a block and sold as mutton!

And the *Little Jesus?* he was aboard the *Little Jesus*, and those men on the deck above were pulling on his ropes, were striding his deck. It was a rape, and almost he wept for his ship's violation. English timbers to be sailed by devils' hands. . . .

He opened his eyes to see faint light through the open scuttle overhead. They were under way. To the bagnios . . . the slave-yards. . . . He twisted his hands and found that they were roped behind his back. He could not break the bonds, and every movement was torment, as if hot lead rolled in his skull and scorched behind his eyes. His brain was loose, it seemed, and swayed from temple to temple like a heavy pea in a baby's rattle.

"Oh, God," he groaned, "why? why? why?"

"For sailing on a Sunday," came Crouch's voice from behind him. "Lie quiet, boy, even though it serves you right. No use struggling. You'll need all your strength, I tell you, even more than if those black scum had been mermaids. . . . I didn't finish telling you . . ."

"Where are you? what's happened to the others? how many of us are there?" Francis tried to shout but could only whisper.

He felt rather than heard Crouch roll on the deck, then the old man's panting body twisted up beside him.

"Don't fret yourself," said Crouch. "We're battened down here in our own lazarette, like cockroaches. And as for how many of us . . . There's Will Craven and Andy Dier, and that's about the catch, counting us. There's some they've kept to clear the foremast and rigging and caulk the shot-holes and trice up the guns. The other lads are being chewed by mermaids this very moment, and I envy them, I do. At least they're women even if they have got tails like mackerel. Now lie easy, lad. There's naught to be gained by fretting."

"What else to do but fret?" Francis groaned to feel his brain hammer hammer hammer in his skull. "The *Jesus* in pagan hands! It's like a little Calvary, and you ask me not to fret! And there's you, and me, and the others. . . . What'll they do with us!"

"Sell us," said Crouch, "and I hope I get a good old drunken master who just wants someone to talk to. I always have wanted to argue with the heathen."

"Be quiet, quiet!" cried Andy Dier, one of the gunners, from near Francis's feet. "I'd rather have my own thoughts than your jangle. Argue with the heathen! The only argument they'll give you is the bastinado. They lie you on your belly and rope up your legs and flick your soles with a rod till you faint like a woman nine months gone. And to think we had no thought of it in the sunlight not half an hour since. It makes you sick, it does. What was God doing?"

"Ay," said Will Craven, one of the seamen. "If you knew where you were a-going to you'd not be so gay——"

"Gay!" cried Francis.

"Gay compared to what you're going to feel like. I know, by gogs. I was in a bagnio once. Yea, for two bloody years I was, afore I was ransomed. That was in Salee, that was. Well, I'll be no slave no more, I tell ye. I'm going to be cut, I am, and have my head shaved like a billiard-ball and grow a beard to my toes. You just watch. . . ."

"Quiet, sirrah!" cried Francis. "Would you deny God?"

"Depends what you mean by denying," said Craven. "Not in my heart, I wouldn't. I'd still talk to him at the bottom of my throat no matter what my lip might say when heathen were about."

"Tell us about them," said Dier. "Are they such devils as they look?"

"Some are, some not. Just like Christians. When you're sold's like getting married. You don't know what you're getting till you've got it. But one thing I must warn you—keep away from their women."

"There're women infidels, too?" cried Dier, aghast.

"All women're infidels," said Craven, "only these don't hide it. What they do hide's their faces. They look like ghosties, for they pin a veil over their noses and chins so that you can just see their eyes. They've got women's eyes whatever else they've got, and I'm telling you, don't you try to find out how much women they are or you'll be strangled with a bowstring or have your tripes pecked out by vultures. They're almighty jealous and they lock up their women in cages and keep fellows—*negres* usually—that can't do wickedness, having been cared for with a sharp stone or knife."

"Only black men, not white?" cried Dier. "They don't do that to us white, do they, for the love of God?"

"Well, only sometimes. . . . You see, they use boys. Between eight and twelve year before they feel like men. Then they geld them with a sharp knife and bury them in sand up to the neck. In sand the hotter the better, for that stops bleeding. They leave them there all night and only about half of them die. It's a rare profit, for those that live they sell to the harems, and get a goodly price, I'm told. And some sing sweet like little birds, sweeter than women."

"They are fiends," said Dier, groaning. "Oh, Lord, protect us!"

"Don t listen to the rogue," snarled Crouch. "I can but wonder that I did not hang him within a day of sailing. Don't listen to him, Andy. Like a satan's brach, he'd tempt you with fear to his own damnation. For those that sell their souls need company in hell. These pagans are no worse than many Christians; God forgive me for saying it, but it's truth. They are not usurious and do not make hogs of themselves with wine. And if you work hard

they feed you well, for a slave beaten and unfed cannot work. Don't kick against them, be obedient and watch your chance to skip. We'll escape yet with the help of God."

"Then why didn't God help us in the fight?" asked Craven. "Why didn't He send a little wind?"

"I'm not talking to you, you damned Judas. Go, drown yourself!"

"But I'm talking to you and you're not captain now. We're brother-slaves together. You just lie quiet for a change and let a fellow that knows talk about what he knows, and I know Africa."

"Yea," said Dier, "tell me. . . ."

Crouch gritted his teeth and lay still, repenting the chances he had failed to take of flogging Craven during the voyage.

"I'll get him," he muttered, "when we're ashore."

"Let him sink to hell his own way," said Francis. "Let the rogue talk."

He lay and tried not to listen, for even the effort of listening sent bubbles of pain to burst inside his skull. And iron, too, was in his skull. He could feel it sliding at the least move, it was like a weight that kept his head down as if clamped to the deck, while all the time those bubbles of pain rose to behind his eyes, pressed there, and burst. He tried to escape this torment by letting his mind drift while the voice of Craven, a deep chuckling sound, throbbed meaninglessly in his ears.

Hours passed. He drowsed and woke again, to drowse again. Against the ship's timbers—his ship's timbers—he could hear the slap of water at her stern. The sun must be cooling, for he no longer sweated even in this closed box, tartly stinking with sweat and sour breath. A wind had sprung up, a traitor-wind had risen to the whistle of the Turk. For this was a heathen coast, a hot land of pagans facing Christendom and the Pope of Babylon in Rome. It was a desert land, men had told him. Only the rim, cooled by the inland sea, was rich with grass and palms and studded with pagan castles. Beyond, over the edge of the world, to hell itself perhaps, lay barren heat, the Sahara, naught but untrodden sand and an occasional palm beside rare water-pools, and heaps of ancient rock like blinding mirrors flashing heat and sunny flame. Francis had heard tales of men who had tried to escape the bagnios and who had lost themselves in sand that moved and ruffled and changed its form in a night, mountains turning flat, mountains rising suddenly when the wind veered; sand pock-marked with wind-ripples; and sometimes these men had seen visions of water and of cool-shaded houses, and had run to reach them, had run miles with the vision retreating before them, houses quivering behind heat and sliding ever back into the sky, fruit ever beyond arm's reach, water beyond lips' drinking, until those men had stumbled and fallen with the devil's vision yet beyond them.

There would be no escape south for him, he knew. He could only hope to steal a boat or to be ransomed. But he would escape. He was quite certain of that, for he was young and had faith in God. But he would not worry his head with such thoughts, for when he did, his blood became hot and the bubbles rose to burst in pain behind his eyes. Let him think of cool things, of English brooks in shadowing woods, of grass soft as cushions and richly green, with the blue compassionate sky so close it seemed the clouds might stroke your cheeks. Not this sky of grey eddying heat, not these waters that spun back the sunlight as if from armour. Let him think of England, he implored his heart.

On the deck above, naked feet were running, yards were creaking, turning to the wind. He heard orders shouted in an outlandish tongue. Quietly, he lay, rolling a little with the roll of the ship, and tried to think of England.

Son of a Plymouth ship-builder, he had been reared by a devout mother and taught the love of ships by his father, a tall black-bearded sailor who had left the sea for the yards. But the sea had not left him, it had still tormented him, and when his friends came, skin tanned by the sun of the Indies, to talk of treasure taken and Spaniards slain, he would listen and be gay with them, but when they had left, he would brood apart and Francis would be careful at work to make no mistake lest he be kicked or cuffed or cursed. And he did not resent his father's stifled anger at such times, for he, too, felt discontented in that safe home while other lads were sailing to the isles of paradise and seeing wondrous waters, metallic greenery undreamed of, and hearing voices of birds unknown to England. Francis would listen to his father's friends and would feel his blood itch for adventure; and alone in his chamber he would foin before a glass, sword in hand, as if to kill his mirrored self.

Francis Drake, after whom he had been named, had often sat in his mother's parlour, plump little man with the cocked-up brows and great belly laugh, and Drake's cousin, Hawkins, golden-bearded, slightly querulous, ever fussing about ships' stores as if he carried treasure away instead of sailing to bring it back—battened down in his hold, Spanish garments and Indian jewels. And when the lad, quivering with excitement as if his soul smelt Spanish blood, could not hold his tongue but must blab of the deeds he would do when he grew older, Hawkins would gaze at him with his pale blue eyes, coldly, and remind him of the mighty risks, retelling of Spanish treachery and of how he had almost been taken in the battle of San Juan de Ulloa when Drake had slipped off in his *Judith*. But the risks were half the joy in young Francis's dreams, nor would he heed Hawkins when he hinted at Drake's treachery. Drake had been his godfather, little Francis had been given his name, and to the boy, the man had been a hero, as he was to him to this day. Besides,

his father had fought at San Juan aboard Hawkins's *Jesus*—that was why he had named his own ship the *Little Jesus*, in memory of that voyage—and he had never spoken of Drake fleeing from powder. He had but said that in that woeful time none could be certain what others did, and mayhap Drake had missed his comrades in the sudden tropical night, for that was Drake's own tale.

Never had Francis wearied of hearing of that adventure when his father or Crouch, or even Hawkins, returned to it, as they so often did. They had haggled for slaves in the dank jungles of Africa and then had sold them at rich profit in the Indies at San Juan when the damned Spanish admiral, famous Mendenez, had sailed suddenly in with a mighty fleet. Treacherously, as was to be expected of the Roman rogues, they had attacked under a show of friendliness, and the crippled *Jesus* had been left to sink in Spanish waters. That adventure had been his father's last in the black slave trade. When his wife, Francis's mother, had heard the tale—and it had reached England before his father, for he had been with Hawkins in the *Judith* and they had not limped home until Drake had first reached England with his story, when it had been feared the *Judith* was lost—she had brought out her precious Bible, Tyndale's Bible, and had made the poor fool, more fearful of her than of the scaly monsters of the deep, swear before God never to sail again. Yet the sea had not been cheated, it had gulped him at last, taken him in a sudden squall within sight of land while he had been out fishing with friends. And it had not been long before Francis's mother, realising that little humans cannot frustrate the will of God, had followed her husband on that last exploration of seas beyond sounding. Then Francis to his own terror had his dreams realised, he had become his own master and could sail whither he desired, to the isles of the sirens, even to that iceberg on which Judas periodically sat to cool his bottom, hot from hell's fire.

His father's old shipmate, David Crouch, had stayed to work in the yards, and they had built this ship and had sailed her for good profit, until now.

God wills it, as Crouch would always say, for he had faced so many perils and weathered them unhurt that he had no doubt of God's personal protection, so long as you were careful never to defy Him, as Francis had defied Him by sailing on His Sunday. God's will be done, there was no fighting God. He caught you in His terrible net of love, fierce dominant possessive love, and if you struggled in the web, He tossed you in that net to hell. Nay! nay! do not think of hell, for then the leaden bubbles burst in his skull, rippling in torment on the bone. Nay, nay . . . think quickly, think quickly of England.

Once in a cobbled street he had spoken to the great Sebastian Cabot and had met the old man again in the Muscovy Company's London office. Old Cabot, mighty Cabot, had peered into his

face and had chuckled and patted his head and given him an apple. An apple from the wrinkled hand of the great Sebastian! Francis had treasured the gift until it had grown wrinkled and tooth-proof, yet precious. He had met tall Hugh Willoughby, he who had spoken to the mad Tsar Ivan of Muscovy who had wanted to marry the Virgin of England. But even these great men had never been so dear to Francis as plump Francis Drake.

He had learned under his father and Crouch how to build ships and had sailed those ships, his ships. He had studied the art of navigation and had discussed it with that cunning wizard, Dr. Dee, at Mortlake; he had been to Spain when but a lad and had seen France many a year ago. He had thought himself so brave a lad with adventures greater than Hawkins's, than Drake's, than Willoughby's, even than Cabot's, to be sailed before he died. Now, this . . . swift chaining of adventure. Chains for a sailorman, for a lad who was just awakening to the mysteries of the world and finding wonder in strange lands and in the eyes of women. Chains rasped his wrists and ankles when he moved, but there were subtler chains about his spirit. Even curiosity was imprisoned under this despair, for what use was his living now, a sailorman without a ship?

Armed men were stamping above. He heard the clack of steel and the thud-thud of iron shoes. It was dark in the lazarette with only filmy light creeping through the scuttle above, but his eyes were used to darkness. He could see the grey-black shapes of his three fellow-prisoners when he lifted his head to listen, and he seemed to lift with it a hundredweight behind his eyes, while against the walls were stacked and roped the barrels and cases, ship's stores, kept in tiers by timbers lashed between deck-stanchions.

Jarringly, the scuttle was flung open and light from a lanthorn gleamed on steel and gold-and-silver-threaded cloth. He saw the whites of eyes and the glitter of swords.

Half a dozen pirates, bright as parrots in their Eastern raiment, turbaned, and with tasselled sashes about their waists, looked down. They upheld a lanthorn with horn so old and stained and buckled that its light but fuzzed without defining brown foreheads, noses black-nostrilled, and bright eyes. One who was obviously the leader wore an iron helmet chased with delicate designs of loops and whorls, while from its rim a web of mail folded dully to the shoulders.

Carefully, fastidiously he came down the steps, his men following him, then legs apart he balanced himself on the rough timbers beneath which the bilge gurgled and belched to the roll of the ship.

"Speak, Nazarenos," he said quietly in the lingua franca—that bastard tongue of the Barbary Coast known to all sailormen—"speak, pig-eaters and drunkards. Does your captain live?"

"I am the master," said Francis; "this is—this was my ship. What would you have of me?"

"Merely words," said the Turk; "there is naught else that you can give me. But Allah desires your souls. It is too soon yet for you to learn the true faith, you have been reared too long in evil ways and have forgotten God in the prophet Jesus, to Whom all praise. Come, tell me. Are any of you dogs enlightened as to the true Prophet? Quickly, for I am surfeited with gazing on your ugly faces."

"Our God is not your god," said Francis.

"Nay, not mine!" said Crouch.

"I do not know yet of your god," quavered Dier. "I . . . I cannot say . . . yet."

"I can," cried Will Craven. "I'm aching for the circumcision, I am. I was educated once by a holy fellow but I was a young fool then, and—and—well, I didn't understand, that's all. But I've pondered since and that's why I was sailing back to Barbary. Just longing for Allah and the thought of houris in heaven. I put my mark to that, and I'm a religious man, by God!"

The Turk, thumbs in his sash, turned slowly to Craven, and spat.

"So you are ready, eh?" he said. "But first, you know what we do to renegados, those who say they love the Prophet and then betray him? We flay you from toe to crown and leave you on a dungheap to the flies and dogs and lizards."

"I—I know," quavered Craven.

"And you will sail our galleys against Christians?"

"I'm aching for the chance," said Craven, leering at Crouch. "Just aching for it," he said.

"You will have that chance," said the Turk contemptuously. He turned to his soldiers and spoke in their own tongue. Then without a glance at Craven, he strode back up the steps while his men slashed the ropes from the prisoners' ankles. Francis tried to stand upright when the ropes were off, but his legs seemed brittle, the joints hard, and he had to lean against the bulkhead that separated them from the main hold, while, cursing and groaning, his companions cautiously tested their limbs.

"Come," said one of the Turks in lingua franca, and painfully, yet glad to escape that foul lazarette, Francis followed him up the stairs, through the open scuttle to the deck.

Drunk with fresh air, he stood swaying, taking huge breaths, while the wind ruffled his beard and dried the sweat on his skin. The plum-blue sky glittered with stars like flaked diamonds, and the ropes creaked friendlily about him, the waters slapped the ship's sides. Too late the wind; and he could have wept to see dark men swing the yards of his *Little Jesus* to that laggard wind and sheet home her sails.

Behind him he heard Crouch whisper:

"Alexandria! . . . thank God it's not Algiers! I've heard tales of Algiers that'd freeze your veins. They say the bey there's mad as a shark. . . ."

Francis turned to see, low on the skyline, as if a cluster of stars had tumbled to be caught and held in a giant's hand, the flittering lights of a great city, of the pirate city of Alexandria.

This, then, was the end of youth's journeying, end of dreams of fighting Spaniards and of lugging cargoes of gold from sinking galleons: to end like a rat in the sewers of Egypt. He had not sufficient money to hope for ransom, and being no Roman Catholic, the fathers of the redemption would spurn his body though they might fish for his soul. They would have less love even than the Turks for him, for he remembered the burnings when Holy Mary had made martyrs in Smithfield. Here in these prisons, these bagnios, it might most likely be his doom to die, far from Christian comrades. What chance had men of escaping from that hell-hole? How few were those of whom he had heard escaping! few, few indeed, and they were usually crippled and useless after years of manacles and floggings in this hot desert country.

He shut his eyes on the swaying lights and turned to look upon his captors. Under the moonlight, in the flare from yellow lanthorns, the Turks' oily faces gleamed like wet mud. The iron-helmeted man who had spoken to them in the lazarette was apparently the *reis*, for now he stood on the poop, gazing at the approaching city, legs apart to keep the body's balance, the scimitar in his sash poking out its curved blade behind as if he had a silver tail. He did not move, save now and then to shout orders at the men below at the whipstaff; his face was the face of a hawk, sharp-beaked and with receding chin, and his eyes were birds' eyes, black and dully evil. Janissaries stood behind him in their regulation pose of lowered eyes and folded arms. Statuesquely they stood: only their long-skirted blue coats swayed in the wind and the heavy bird-of-paradise plumes on their tall hats seemed to breathe, to flutter as if to make ready for flight. These plumes—insignia of veterans—unrolled down their backs almost to behind their knees and were barbarically coloured. They were gripped in sheaths crusted with bastard stones that gleamed like glass, and a sheath ran from top of each high white hat to the gaily embroidered brim; at the back, impaled with a copper spoon, a long cloth sleeve curled under the plume to beneath the shoulders. Immobile, these notorious warriors of the Turks stood behind the turbaned *reis:* defenders of Islam, they were nevertheless born Christians, raped from their homes and faith at childhood and trained by Moslems to become their most fanatical fighters. Their dark chins were naked while huge moustachios curled almost to their ears.

Francis watched them intently, amazed that the true faith, once born in a man, could be, not merely quenched, but made to burn with intense enmity of that same faith. These Christians had become Christ's sworn and bloodiest foes, and he wondered if he, too, had been stolen from the cradle, would he have forgotten Christ? Nay! Never. . . . Christ was to him more living than himself and he could not conceive a world without faith in Him. He had been born with this faith and, he swore, it could never have been put out in him . . . yet these men had been Christian children once. Not English children, not Protestants . . . papists, mayhap, brought up to worship a pope as false as Allah.

He turned from them scornfully to gaze over the sea in moonlight, a violet sea with blue shadows like bruises edging into black. The accursed city came close, but he kept his back to it. The galleys were no longer with them. Evidently they had not been too damaged to continue their voyage while sending the bark to be overhauled. That was reckless of them, thought Francis with a flicker of hope that died even as it flickered, for the Knights of Malta, those heroic defenders of Christendom, were ever alert, seeking a Moslem prize. But even the knights would never dare come as close as this to an armed heathen city. And after all, they were papists, and it was probably better to be in Moslem hands than in Roman. They might have racked him and burnt him while the Turk would but set him to work.

He could not keep his back to his doom. He had to turn to look again on Alexandria. Like any Christian city, it seemed, and only with an effort could he realise that he, Francis Leland, was to live shackled there, a slave. He had often shuddered at such tales but they had never seemed real; even when escaped prisoners had shown scars and scabs as proof of captivity, he had never believed that he, the divinely wrought one, could know such tribulations. Even now, with ropes tying his wrists at his back, he could not yet fully believe it, although he knew that in those lights ahead, Christians lay suffering, brave English sailors fettered wrist to wrist with gentlemen from Spain and France and Italy and Germany; all the nations of Christ, however they might quarrel amongst themselves, were fettered there as brothers in suffering, were toiling side by side through the hot days under the lash, rowing heathen galleys, building heathen palaces, casting cannon that would kill their fellow-Christians. They had no church, no priests, they prayed alone and sang their hymns in the dirt of fever-sweating bagnios.

And now he would be one of them. . . .

Yea, to that had he come. There lay his doom. Francis caught his breath and sucked his lips. The city was white, white squares of buildings. Torches were flaring to welcome them and pale figures fluttered on the wharves. Over all, rose two tall pointed pillars, high above the flat roofs. What were those pillars? churches?

It was a land of ghosts, of ghostly houses, of ghosts in shrouds talking ghostly tongues, high-pitched and clamorous. And the soft land-breeze brought strange smells from strange woods burning, sweetish and almost intoxicatingly spicy odours. And there sounded music such as he had never heard from flute, trumpet, hautbois, lute, shawm or bombard: monotonous music which, to his untutored ears, sounded all more or less on one note, played, he thought, mainly on stringed instruments. But then came a drum, and bells, and what sounded like iron rods beaten together. It was melancholy music in its monotony, thought Francis: like the wailing of the damned, beyond despair yet plaintively wailing. Small wonder when these creatures were all damned. . . .

They passed behind the Isle of Pharos, a white rocky wall to the harbour, behind the causeway, to the wharves of the city itself.

There were howling crowds to greet them, men in dirty white under crackling torches howled at them. Resin spat into Francis's face as a Turk leaned forward to grin at him, and his torch burned close. Brown faces, black faces, and all bearded; and a few women, concealed save for their eyes. He stood, dazed by the noise, wishing to hide, for he felt sick and shamed like an animal on show. Then he remembered our Lord and that he was a child of Christ's and that these creatures, triumphant though they were for the moment, were spawn of Satan.

He held high his head and even tried to swagger as the soldiers prodded him. Crouch staggered at his side, grunting and cursing, and once he slipped on the sand and stones. The mob kicked at him while the soldiers dragged him to his feet again.

Francis twisted a smile to his lips. He would not bow to this scum. He would not pleasure them by showing fear. Erect, he walked, although each step was pain because of his chafed ankles, nor did he flinch from the resin of torches, nor did he wipe the spittle from his face. He would not bow to them. Had not Christ Himself been spat on by the unbelievers? had He not staggered up to Calvary under the weight of His own Cross and with thorns to prick His brow? What were his sufferings compared to the Lord Christ's? Yet it was not easy to smile when your heart seemed to contract with fear and your skin flinched from touch of these heathen dogs.

Torchlight swayed on white walls, lighting and shadowing latticed windows behind which the women chirruped like birds in their cages. Teeth and eyes: he seemed to see naught else in dusky faces. Turbans of many colours cunningly swathed on shaven skulls bubbled around him in darkness, in glare. Curved doorways, he passed, pillared doorways, walls split with squarish and rectangular windows, walls daubed with intricacies of designs like trellises for flowers, crenellated roof-tops as in castles at home, and walls with arrow-slits. They seemed to dance in torchlight while the shouting, laughing mob was pressed back by the guns and spears of janissaries.

Then suddenly Francis was prodded sideways and he saw a curved door open blackly before him. The soldiers pushed and kicked him and he went sprawling on to his face, and the darkness seemed to rise up solidly against him. But it was darkness in which sounded Christian voices, Spanish voices, Italian, French, German, but not Turkish, voices; and at that sound, it seemed to Francis that he was home yet in hell as he crawled on hands and knees. . . . Yea, home, although a prisoner, for with the clanging of that door, the shooting of those bolts, the heathen was bolted out and, for the time, he was alone, if chained, amongst friends.

CHAPTER III

SLAVE TO THE OAR

SUNLIGHT brought Francis out of sleep; it dragged him from a terrible world where he had stood alone, God-deserted, amongst devils, and it brought him into a world scarcely less appalling where he lay fettered to fettered slaves. He had not so much slept as sunk into a jungle of terror in which reality had merged into dream. He had heard others talking—French, Spanish, German, Italian, even English voices—but he had not listened; he had shut that world away, hoping to escape it by closing his eyes, for his body was exhausted, yet it trembled and ached. But he had not escaped knowledge of the hell to which he had been brought; truth and nightmare were equally terrible, soaking him in his own sweat. Other captives had tried to talk to him, to rouse him out of his despair, but he had turned his face away and would not answer, although he had heard voices he recognised, one in particular being the voice of a lad he had been fond of when a boy. No. . . . He would not listen even to Tom Finch when Finch came weeping and chattering; he had pretended to sleep, not to hear, fearing his anguish would be too great if he talked to this ghost from the past. He had thought Finch drowned when, years ago, his ship had not returned; not even to Finch, whose shrill voice brought such memories that they made him weep, would he say one word. For when he heard Finch he saw England.

But now sunlight slowly roused him out of feverish dreams, and he lay and clenched his teeth and strove to forget yesterday. It was but sparse sunlight, yet proof that the world still existed outside this nightmare prison; it slid through gratings in the flat ceiling and through barred holes high in the whitewashed walls. Francis lay close to one of these gratings and the sun, hot even at this early hour, scorched his tired eyes, yet he opened his mouth and took deep breaths, as if he would drink the light like wine. His head still

ached, as though weighted to his wooden pillow, but not with the same blinding pain as yesterday, and he could move freely, although his legs were ironed and his wrists were chained together. He shook himself and blinked, then saw that someone leaned over him. The face, being in shadow and thickly bearded, was a stranger's, yet . . . there was something in those eyes that stirred memories . . . memories of someone, of childhood. . . . Then he noticed that the man held a stone cup and he realised that his throat was cracking with thirst. He took the cup and drank greedily: the water was like ice as it trickled down his chin and neck.

Now that sleep was going he could see the man more clearly. It was no young man, and there were scars on the wrinkled skin that was leathery and dark as a Turk's. His beard was a dirty grey and very long, and greying hair fell in greasy locks over his shoulders. In his wide blue eyes was a peculiar intentness that Francis did not quite like, for it made him feel small like a schoolboy; they had an indrawn look and, being very pale, seemed blind and almost milky, but the voice when he spoke was gentle.

"Feeling spryer, lad?" he asked. "You'd best wash your face. 'Tis black, and there are too many blackish faces in these parts. 'Tis ungodly to be so black, for were we not made in His image? and He was no black God Who sent His Son to us."

"What matter if I never wash again!" groaned Francis. What mattered anything, for his ship was lost, defiled with dusky hands? He would never wash again.

"It doesn't matter greatly," shrugged the big man, "although, as I say, it makes us know which be God's folk amongst all these heathen. But I doubt me if the saints washed in the desert or the Israelites on their perilous journey. Yet I itch to see what your dad's son looks like inside the grime. Yea, I am curious, for it is nigh on fifteen years since I saw you, lad."

"Don't you remember Johnny Fox?" cried Crouch.

And Francis did remember. He had been a boy then, not fourteen years of age, when Fox had sailed with his dad. He had vanished like so many sailormen, and they had thought him drowned. Had he been prisoner here all those years?

"Fox! Of course, John Fox! Your hand, friend! that I should forget you whom my father loved."

"Small wonder," shrugged Fox. "I was youngish then, and now I am five hundred years of age."

There had been a daughter. Bessy Fox. Francis remembered Bessy more clearly than he remembered her father, for they had been younglings together and he had thought he loved her once. But she had vanished with her father. Her mother had died while Fox was sailing with Hawkins and when he had returned he had found his daughter lousy in a neighbour's care and had taken her off, swearing that no stranger again would ever tend his child. Rather would he

make a sailor of her, he had said, than let her stay on land and learn to be a dirty trollop.

"Bessy!" said Francis, "where is Bessy? She sailed with you?"

John Fox sat back on his haunches and the pale eyes seemed to glaze, to go blind, as he cried harshly: "She is dead."

"She—she went down with the ship?"

"She is dead," said Fox in a voice of such finality that Francis looked away so that he might not see the man's grief. "Get up, lad," said Fox, "it'll be time soon to work."

"What work?"

"I know not what for you," said Fox, "I am in the shipyards."

"Can I go with you?"

"I know not," said Fox. "Come, get you up. And eat." He showed a piece of dried beef, hard and crumbly, in his fist.

"No," said Francis. "I could not . . ."

"You must. You'll find you want it later. You are not a child. You know you'll need your strength."

Reluctantly, Francis took the grey lump and gnawed it. The taste was of decay, a musty memory of food, yet somehow he managed to bolt it down.

"I kept that little for you," said Fox. "It's not very sweet, I fear, but you can't be particular in this hell-house. I tried to be, at first, but I soon learned. You'll eat your own toes when you're starving, lad. I've had fourteen years of it and they seem like fourteen thousand years; so I should know. You're grateful for a living rat sometimes, if only to drink its blood."

"Fourteen years," whispered Francis, "and you're still alive!"

"Alive!" cried Fox and spread his shoulders. The huge chest rose under its ragged shirt, and he laughed. "If you can call it living, shut off from the word of God, save what you can remember with a lad's memory. And I thought little then of Bible-reading. If ever I get back to a Christian land, I'll lock myself away like a monk and read and read the word of God. For my memory is all gaps and it maddens me. Fourteen years! a pinch in God's eternity. Yea, fourteen years I've lived in hell, but I've dreamed, lad. Dreams have kept me from the grave, and some day, not long, mayhap, I'll tell you of those dreams when they come true. I've looked in those Turks' faces and I've smiled in my beard to think I have my secret. They let me free now because I'm well behaved and respectful to their devils' faces, and I'm good at barbering. I help to shave their greasy skulls. I hold the razor in my hand, sharp for throat-slitting, but I don't use it that way. I'm respectful, salaaming and talking to them as if they were admirals. They trust me with a razor now. And I've cleansed my soul in this spiritual gong. I was a sinful man when I came here, less than your age, and I have spent each second of those fourteen years unlearning Satan's lessons. . . . God,

I am ready, waiting for Your call, like Moses by the bush, the muscles of my soul like iron for love of You! . . ."

Those eyes were no longer blind. They shone as if lit candles gleamed behind the pupils while he looked up at the dark ceiling as though to heaven. The grey hair was tossed back and the long sharp nose inflated its nostrils as if it sniffed at angels. Then abruptly the ecstasy was gone and the mouth shut with a click of teeth, the great chest unloosed its breath and seemed to sag, the hands unclenching.

"You're young yet, lad," he smiled at Francis. "I was like you once, before they got me here. You've not been lonely yet like I've been and wrestled with your soul to squeeze the evil out of it. . . . But how do you feel now with some food in your womb? Better? . . . That's good, for they'll be coming soon for you. They're short of men, I hear, so I suppose they'll take you."

"Who? Where?"

Fox turned to him, sadly. "I can't say for sure," he grumbled, "but most like, the galleys. . . ."

The galleys . . . those long lean vessels that had taken the *Little Jesus*. That would be poor return indeed, after the loss of his ship to be chained to his ship's destroyers. Galleys of Islam, coffins of Christendom. . . . Francis felt cold sweat on his chest and in his hair. And as he gaped at Fox in horror, the wooden door was flung open and he turned to see Turkish warriors black in the sunlit opening.

In the dark bagnio, the slaves rose with the clank of chains. They groaned and spat and shuffled their feet, and Francis rose with them, edging into the shadows in futile hope of being unnoticed while the Moslems strode amongst them, pricking the sick or lazy to their feet with sword or spear. They came to Francis, paused before him where he stood in the gloom. Their dark faces, whites of eyes like slits in storm-lanthorns, peered at him. He felt quick steady hands unlocking the chains at his ankles, heard the click of the key when it turned.

Gently, Fox put his hand on his shoulder. "Don't struggle against them, lad," he said. "Go with them quietly and take it as a trial from God, as if He were testing you for Heaven, and I'll see what can be done for you later. I have a little influence, and what I have is yours."

Francis forced a smile and walked erect when the guards pricked him to the door. There he turned to wave at Fox and Crouch and they smiled kindlily as they waved back.

Sunlight blinded him. It seemed to flake from the white walls of the unpaved street, to sting his eyes as if with acid. He blinked and looked about him through his lashes. But there was little to see, a monotony of white walls with squarish windows strongly

latticed, and dark doors in archways. Some Turks were passing, but they did not trouble to look at him, they but drew their garments close lest the cloth be contaminated by touch of a Christian. He was surprised to see how poor so many of them looked in dark homespun like worn blankets, but there were others dressed in damasks and silks under a transparent white bernous. But all were turbaned and some had breeches wide enough for a dozen men to use together. There were no women to be seen and he was for a moment surprised, remembering English housewives ever gadding abroad, until he remembered how in this land women were locked away like jewels. Some boys came with a donkey, prodding an iron goad into a raw wound in its shoulders to which flies clung, and they shrilled insultingly at the prisoners walking awkwardly behind their guard. Francis would not look at them, but tried to peer through passing lattices into the cool rooms within. There was one tall-towered building that he guessed must be a church for he saw, beyond its white arches, straw mats laid for prayer. The shops were open to the street, piled with food or clothing or pots, and the shopkeepers sat cross-legged within.

He found small interest in the houses with their white sameness, but the passers-by fascinated him even in his misery. Their great cloaks, twisted over their heads like hoods, were of many colours and some were intricately embroidered. Others wore turbans, others conical caps. Rarely did he glimpse a woman shuffling past, eyes seeming libidinous above the veil, long robes hiding even their feet. Camels with their air of supercilious disdain lopped, chuckle-legged, by, their humps heaped with boxes. A tapestried litter swayed near, preceded by negroes roaring like bulls and kicking people from their way. That must house a great man, thought Francis, or a woman rarer than rubies. With every second as he walked, noises grew, mingling deep with high-pitched, clang of metal with shrill of voices, as the city awoke. People were arguing, crack-voiced, gruff-voiced, bird-voiced, cavern-voiced, servants were quarrelling like cats, and spitting, shopkeepers were howling wheedlingly, wearily, being but half awake and custom being asleep, while street-vendors yowled mournfully or yapped with exasperation because none answered with clink of coin. There, a ragged wretch, armoured with scabs, pushed by with curds in skins hung from a long pole over his shoulder and dribbling, slavering water at every step on the dewy earth. With every step, the din grew louder, a disturbed aviary next an animal cage, for words did not count in these outcries which were but a wail, a song without music of humanity exasperated at having another day to work through before night and the animal pleasures of night, sleep and love could come again.

Francis wore no hat, his morion having been lost aboard the *Little Jesus*—or perhaps stolen with his armour—and the rising sun prickled his bare head. He almost hoped he would be struck crazed

by it, as he had seen some men turn to mad dogs at a midday blow, and he shook himself as if to dislodge the heat, as if it were breathed by the flies settling on him in thick garlands. Then as they turned a corner he forgot to fear sunstroke at sight of the blinding blue of the harbour, scumbled with white foam and sails, for being a sailorman, although a slave, his blood quickened at the smell of salt, so sharply clean to the soul after the stinks of dung and perfume and incense in the city.

It was a wide harbour split into two bays by a narrow peninsula flattened at the tip into a little village. The crenellated forts and towers and mud houses showed sharply edged against the blue, as if clipped out of paper. On high rose an unlighted beacon, stacked with wood in readiness for firing lest an enemy approach, houses huddling at its base. But Francis was weary of seeing these scabby Turkish boxes. It was the sea at which he gazed, like a lover gloating on his beloved waiting wetly for his coming. The harsh blue ruffled with flecks of foam beckoned so coolly in this growing heat, whispering with the wind and the gentle thud of waves on rocks and piles, of love's completion, the peace of lying in his ship with the seas calling him on timber, the insatiable lover, the sea, calling and tapping on timber. . . . But he was shackled, a slave, and therefore could not dive into that bottomless embrace, to the orgasm of delightful death in mermaid's arms.

He hung his head to hide the sea as he trudged through the dancing dust to the bay to the right of the harbour, to the Old Port. This was the pirates' den where only fighting ships could enter and where were moored the six galleys ever ready to row out to defend the city. To the left, the Good Port was open to any nation that dared enter under the protection of the French Consul. Francis knew that little of the place from sailors who had escaped the bagnios and reached England, old and scarred and garrulous with wrongs.

Now he was led to the Old Port where lay the galleys of Islam.

First day of slavery, chained to a fifteen-feet oar beside four other poor devils, with a janissary seated at the end of each row, or bank, of oars. There were fifty-four oars, twenty-seven a side, while on the forecastle, soldiers, trumpeters and sailors stood so closely packed they could barely move a finger, and on the stern-castle, under a peacock-coloured canopy, the *reis* sat amongst his officers.

As he crawled into his place, Francis looked at the man beside him. He was a lean little fellow with a scar running from under his right ear, over the cheek, almost to the upper lip. He grinned ruefully at Francis.

"Good day to you," he said. "Mighty fine weather for a row, lad. And to think I once rowed for pleasure, with a whore to splash in the stern!"

Francis grimaced a smile as he sat beside him while janissaries locked his right ankle to a metal stanchion on the bottom-boards and slipped his fingers into a rectangular slot in the oar.

Then at the crack of a whip and the shouting of the boatswains, to the pealing of trumpets and rattle of drums, the rowers bent their backs to the fat oars. There was wind enough for sailing but the sails would not be freed until they were out of the harbour and in the open Mediterranean. Until then, Francis rowed, both hands on the oar, being pulled rather than actually pulling, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, in time to the boatswain's steady clang-clang on the gong. When the oar came back, his legs left the bottom-boards and, but for the shackle, would have flung themselves up and topsy-turvied him on to his head ; then when the oar swung forward—for he was last in his bank : only a jailing janissary separated him from the raised bridge on which the overseers tramped with their bulls' pizzles—he was dragged over wellnigh full length and could feel the iron tug him back like fingers on his ankle.

Fortunately, this first trial was brief. Soon, they rounded the peninsula with its unlit beacon, and the waves came chopping, lifting, heeling the galley as she swung at the pull of the whipstaff into the wind. The rowers' task was temporarily over. Oars were shipped and lashed to the benches, while overhead the sailors loosed the brails and trimmed the yards, sheeting the sails home to windward.

Ropes groaned and whined as the canvas swelled and the ship danced, like an animal slipped from its leash, over the chopping seas. Francis took deep breaths of this salt tangy air he loved, that made him drunk with the spirit of being alive, even though clamped in irons. His flesh seemed lighter than when it stood on earth, as if his spirit itself sang to his lips, leaving skin empty as an air-bladder. There is too much green in the world, he thought: colour of maid's sickness, of young love-longing, colour of fever and death, of gangrened flesh and scum on inland pools, of rotten cheese and ducks' excreta, colour of dreamless landsmen ; there is not enough blue in the world, he thought, that colour of legitimacy and of the saints, there was the sky, of course, but even the sky was never as blue when bending over earth as over the sea, and particularly over this bluest of blue seas, this tideless landlocked sea, this Middle Sea shielding Europe from fiery Africa.

And now, away from imprisoning land, there was always the possibility of a rescue, for already his fancy saw himself escaping, saw himself swimming, saw himself hailed by an English ship as he led the slaves, all like himself miraculously freed, in an assault on their masters. . . . But such silly dreams merely made reality more hideous when he squeezed them from his mind under the pressure of despair and looked about him at his comrades lounging over their oars, heads down in apathy, many of their naked backs scarred from floggings. Rows of bent backs as if the wretches prayed, when most

were beyond even prayer, bowed backs of Christians chained to Infidels' oars. . . . Would these miserable creatures, beaten like curs to come to heel, have strength to fight, even for freedom? Besides, now that they were in the open sea, iron rings were slipped over each man's head, so that he could neither fight nor defend himself.

And should they sight an English ship, it would mean battle and possible slavery for other Englishmen. He would have to sit helpless on this bench, watching; and should English guns aim true and the balls crash on this galley, he would not have a chance to save himself. Chained, he would sink with the rest of the ship's furniture. He remembered that galley sunk under the *Little Jesus'* fire. No rower had escaped from her. They had gone down, down in their prison, to the mermaids and big-toothed fish. Not one rower had escaped, and why should he be luckier than they? No, no! Please God, let them not sight a Christian ship. Even should the Turks lose the fight, himself most probably would die.

Alexandria dipped over the skyline, beyond the heaving stern with the *reis* under his bloody banner of the Crescent seated cross-legged on cushions. The galley seemed to bounce on the waves, to frisk along. Tempests were rare in the Mediterranean, as Francis knew, but there were dangerous whirlpools, like the Mad Sea off Sicily, and unexpected eddies, currents without apparent reason. Not often were these inland waters whipped to high waves, and even when they did rise up, they were but little waves compared to the mountainous breakers of oceans. Almost always here lay this present dimpled sea, now and then flaking into choppy waves. Yet sometimes winds became violent, scurrying down from the mountains, snaking in and out of narrows, although shipwrecks were few. No use for him to pray for a storm that might—infinitesimal might—bring compassion enough to these dark devils for them to free their slaves so that they could take their chance in swimming; although at some river-mouths the winds did flog the waters sufficiently to toss ships, men and even fish high, wary sailors knew those dangerous points and veered far from them.

The shining buildings of land sank, then rose, then sank again, with the high four-sided pillar in the city rising to a point, now blurring in the distance, fading into the sky. Francis asked the rower beside him what it was called, and he said that some named it Pompey's Pillar, and others, Cleopatra's Pillar. It had stood there from beyond time, he said: no one knew why.

With the wind now six points on the weather bow, the sails were brailed up and the oars unshipped at a shout from one of the men striding between the rowers, flicking and cracking his bull's pizzle at their bowed backs. They had been sailing north, and apparently these heathens wished to turn east but were too poor seamen to

understand the use of sails. In the feeblest wind, thought Francis grimly, she would sail faster than oars could row, yet these devils, knowing merely a tideless sea, tucked away their sails and steered only with the whipstaff.

The oar stung like pitch on Francis's tender palms when he gripped it. It was a heavy beast, over fifteen feet in length, and he found difficulty in falling into the rhythm which his comrades seemed to feel instinctively, swinging back and forth, in time to the boatswain's gong clanging from the stern.

He had to lean far forward and swing upward, in fear of knocking the bowed back of the man in front; then when forward, crouching with all breath squeezed out of him, he had to push up so that the blade would sink deep into water. And being at the end of the bank, he had to strain more than the others. Back, forwards: back, forwards: back, forwards: the drag on his muscles was as though hot threads of wire worked under the skin.

Between the banks of rowers, the length of the galley, was a raised bridge, and two tall overseers swaggered up and down, one abaft the mainmast, the other before it, both stripped to the waist and flicking their bull-pizzles, crusty with blood, on high to sting the shoulders of any lazy or too-talkative slave. Even when the rowers paused involuntarily to take breath they were lashed or beaten with a cloth dipped in brine that brought bloody weals but did not break the skin.

Backwards, forwards: muscles strained, wrenched, Francis was dragged by the oar through long hours while the galley roved the Barbary Coast of green and white and reddish hills; on through the morning, they went, into the flaming heat of noon. They met no prey, saw naught but the same coastline, and sometimes a camel, or a man on a donkey, and occasional castles and mud huts and palm trees and the sacred olives—those trees of life without which men would die, for oil is life and is of the spirit to be sprinkled as the chrism on kings' hair, for was not oil in Samuel's horn when he anointed Saul?

But Francis saw little of hills and trees and castles, saw little beyond the dark sweating back of the rower ahead of him. On, on, hour after hour, the galley edged along the shore, oars clicking in the ports, wood wheezing, whining, and water chuckling under the timbers. No pause for the rowers. The *reis* sat on his cushions and ate cool fruits, the juice dabbling his beard; the soldiers on the prow bolted their bread and drank water from hairy skins. At last, and only when the slaves were flopping like dying men at their oars, was the command given to lay to, to lash the oars, and rest.

His food, Francis found, was under his bench, and he gobbled it greedily. It was but two small biscuits and a pot of vinegar and water scummed with twinkling blue rings of fat. To give the slaves a full meal would have been to exhaust them, for fat-stomached and

contented men make feeble rowers. They were allowed just sufficient to keep them active, then after a short rest, back they went to the oars and the boatswain's gong.

Back to the oar, backwards, forwards, backwards, forwards. . . . It was not that the work was hard; once he became used to it and his palms grew calloused, Francis felt that the effort would be very slight, if he could only have something with which to wipe the sweat out of his eyes. But his muscles were not ready for this rhythm. They were hard and would not flow; stubbornly, they seemed to knot together, and they burned as if they were nettles under his skin. But he would not let his comrades see his weakness. Almost casually they held their oars, being well practised, letting the swing do most of the work; and Francis tried to relax as they relaxed, but each swing dragged him so far forward, each pull pulled him so far back that he was ever on the move, unlike those lucky fellows near the ports who scarcely stirred. In time, he thought, setting his teeth, he would learn the tricks of this damned game, for the oar must be mastered like an animal; and it seemed to him that it was indeed an animal hurling him sportively backwards and forwards, tugging, relaxing, tugging, relaxing, endlessly.

Until now, he had always worn a hat, so he pressed his head back on his neck to stop the sun burning the tip of his spine, for it was there, where spine and head joined, he had heard, that men were knocked sunstruck. The other rowers were mostly bareheaded, a few wore woollen caps, and their skin had been tanned for long while his was yet so tender that it burned; but he was grateful even for his own sweat that made him shudder when, now and then, it fell suddenly icily out of his hair and down his back and belly.

It was now well into the forenoon. He had lost all idea of time as if he had been yoked to this oar for eternities, and he wondered if oxen at the plough felt as he felt now. There were occasional brief rests when the sails could be used, and these rests but added to his hell, for the effort of beginning rowing again, of untwisting his muscles, was torture. Almost dazed, scarcely aware of body movement, save as pain, he rowed, blinded with his own sweat that was like acid on his eyeballs.

Suddenly he felt a gentle hand on his shoulder and turned wondering to see the janissary beside him hold him up and press to his cracking lips some bread soaked in oil. For the first time, he looked fully at the man and saw that he was young with black moustachios and pale blue eyes. Of course! these men were Christians, Greeks and Slovaks and Roumanians, peasant boys stolen and reared from childhood by the Turks. This fellow looked like any English youth, save for his shaven chin.

"Thank you," said Francis and was surprised to hear the janissary answer in clear but imperfect English:

"You are welcome, friend."

But he had no further chance to speak with him, and the janissary turned away as if to avoid talk. He stared before him, holding his matchlock between his legs, the long plume nid-nodding in the wind behind him. And the sound of friendly words, even from a Turkish warrior, almost brought tears to behind Francis's lids and, strangely, gave him strength.

Night smoked from the hills, crawled on the ripples of the sea, and with it came a soft breeze, so that the rowers might rest awhile; and Francis dropped his hands that were wet and stinging with broken blisters. He fell forward and slept even while he thought that he would never sleep again.

Yet, often on that voyage, he slept. Night or day, during pauses in rowing, he slept. Day or night, he slept, to wake to the crack of the pizzle, to the beat of the gong in quick or slow time, according to the speed required, to the oar on his bleeding hands. Day or night . . . what mattered it? for he rowed whether moon or sun were overhead, whenever the gong sounded and the pizzles cracked. Little rowing, however, now was needed, and Francis lay in his chains in semi-sleep for hours while winds sent the ship scudding on. No prey, thank God, was sighted. And when the wind dropped, back he went to the oar on his burning hands.

It was nightmare, unreal in its monotonous horror, and even the young janisary's sudden inexplicable kindnesses could not bring full sanity to Francis. He was dazed and sick and no longer had interest in sky or wind or even in his fellow-men, not even in this strange dark-skinned warrior who gave him food and brackish water. Sometimes they drew up on beaches or into rocky inlets for the water-casks to be refilled. The pain of standing erect was such that the slaves could only crawl, like sick dogs, on the sand or grass to seek the salve of shade for their blistering skin. Francis with his eyes sought for the friendly janissary, but the man shifted away, lowering lids, obviously not wanting to be spoken to, so Francis turned from him, not wishing to get him into trouble by a gesture of friendliness. Ecstasy, like a bath after battle, was it to loll in the shade and to dip his burning stinging head in water, such ecstasy indeed that it wiped out fear and despair and Francis became almost happy. Even on featherbeds at home he had not lain with such content as now when he stretched his cramped limbs on cool sand in the shade and hooded his eyes at the winking water that was bleached to a dappled green inshore. The guards did not bother them; they let them, should they wish, stroll on the sparse grass or try to dislodge blue-shelled oysters or green mussels from rocks or to snare small crabs to be crushed and sucked raw.

Bliss was it now to see the green that he had spurned before in favour of the sea's imprisoning blue. Soft green thyme in cracks in

stone, its sharp scent when bruised, and the sweet marjoram, and the myrtle, beloved of lovers. And always the olive that burrows its sturdy roots in stubborn earth and drinks but little, the olive, symbol of God, of peace, its leaf borne by the dove to the Ark. There would be darkness over earth but for the olive. All over Europe, men and women lit their lamps with its oil. The precious holy olive with its gnarled trunk and broken bark. Francis smiled to see it, then shut his eyes on the quivering glare.

Brief were these hours of peace before again he was prodded awake and marched back to the galley to be ironed to his seat.

Over the blinding waters, past little islands, and always keeping close inshore, they rowed. From bleak dawns to glaring middays, to cool evenings when the sea darkened in purple sleep, the galley sought for prey. But the Christian ships kept snugly over the skyline, thank the Lord! As Francis well knew, when they were in this Mediterranean, those Christians sailed in fear, ever eyeing the horizon in dread of the Crescent's rising. Prisoners of the winds, often they were trapped, as he had been trapped, because the winds had soughed into a calm; or they rushed on with taut bowlines and twanging backstays, driving themselves to outdrive the waves, glad of the fiercest gale that would lock the galleys in harbour.

It was almost impossible for him to realise that only a few days ago he had been free like that, with his own ship under his feet. . . . All these chained men, wheezing on the oars, had once been free. . . . But he must not think of it. He must cling to his oar, become indeed almost a part of the oar, insensate, inhuman, like the wood itself. The slow swing drugged him to semi-sleep and he was only vaguely conscious of the heavy weight swinging against his blistered palms.

Bad weather drove them home. They saw it coming in the darkening blue of the water and heard it tremble in the yards above. Luckily, they were not far from Alexandria and the slaves were lashed and kicked and punched to make them row faster than the purple clouds gathering upon the horizon. And they won that race, they barely won it. They were landed and the ship was being safely stowed when the wind leaped out of the clouds and struck at them.

Francis in the bagnio heard it thump the walls and howl as if enraged that they had escaped, and he smiled, for even this filthy bagnio was like home to his aching muscles and stinging palms. He welcomed its gloom friendly with comrades' voices.

Fox was there and he caught Francis in his arms as the lad stumbled and almost fell. His exhaustion seemed to hit Francis a physical blow, as if it had been stored inside him during days and nights of rowing and was now, suddenly, freed. It knocked him to the ground and he could barely keep his eyelids apart.

"Steady, boy," said Fox. "Don't sleep till I tell you so that your dreams can be merry."

"Tell me what?"

"The galleys are done with for you," smiled Fox. "I've seen to it all. To-morrow you work with me in the yards."

"Oh," said Francis, and was ashamed at his own disappointment. The shipyards. . . . He would be even more a slave there than on the sea, with no possible hope of rescue. . . . But he tried to smile to thank Fox.

"Thank you," he whispered and closed the hot lids on his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

LISTEN TO MY BRAIN

IN the morning, however, when other poor devils were taken to the galleys, the tempest having blown itself to a whisper, Francis was grateful to John Fox. To pull at an oar was animal work, needing no skill, and therefore most rowers were gentlemen whose fingers had learned only to clench on a sword-grip or to wield a lance. Now, reduced to living by their skill, they could offer their masters naught but sword-play or cunning at making songs; but madrigals cannot be eaten, and what use sword-play when you are in rags and chains? All their elaborate education in courtesy, in carving meats and hunting, was useless to them here when they were chained to oars and made to toil like animals under the crack of whip or bull-pizzle, patiently kissing the hands of those that kicked them. But fellows like Fox and Crouch and Francis were welcomed, for they were artists in their craftsmanship and the Turks had become an aristocratic race who despised the sweat of labour, preferring their divans, their women, their reading of the Koran, to hard and hand-dirtying work.

Even though he slaved for a detested enemy, Francis was grateful to Fox when he reached the yards and saw the skeleton-ships building around him as he stood in the sawdust and curling paper-thin wood-shavings, for there was delight to soothe even his despair in holding again the tools he loved, in seeing wood smoothed to the sensuousness of woman-skin under the tap of the broad-bladed adze swung between his legs. Not only were Turkish galleys rowed, and often captained, by Christians or renegade-Christians, Christians also built the ships. For why should the Turks blister their hands when they had skilled slaves to toil for them ? Men trained in English shipyards, in Spanish, in French, in Italian yards, worked daily under the drowsy eyes of guards fondling scimitars and matchlocks. There was even laughter heard again, for one's heart must grow light when the work of one's hands is good. Guards mingled companionably with the slaves,

chattering in the lingua franca which, like most sailormen, Francis understood perfectly, for it was the talk of the Barbary Coast, a medley of tongues, of Moorish, Turkish, French, Spanish, Italian, fused into one common language. You could not be subtle in it, nor witty, and your jests were necessarily of the coarsest kind, but it sufficed for common needs and it united slave and master in uneasy friendship.

There were times while he worked in these yards that Francis even forgot his chains, times when he whistled or smiled to sniff the salt sea breezes, for the smells of the city were foul. Alexandria was almost a city upon a city, being hollowed underneath with aqueducts and tanks where the air bred within itself and stank and sweated damply through the walls. Often in the comfortable past had Francis smiled to hear travellers groan at mention of Alexandria's pestiferous air, crinkling their noses and shuddering in retrospect, and he had grinned complacently at thought of the poor devils' queasy stomachs; but now he knew that most certainly they had not lied. This once beautiful port, seven miles in circuit, girt with walls and towers and protected by a broad ditch, lay half in ruins, neglected as a nest of pirates, and corrupt winds belched from the under-city. Yet this under-city served a vital need, for no springs bubbled so near the sea, all water was salt, so a ditch had been opened from the Nile to within half a mile of Alexandria, bringing fresh water in conduits to fill the cisterns and aqueducts below. And from thence came that stink that clung to one's garments and could not be escaped.

Once had this been a noble city of learning and magnificence but now only remained of those times a low pyramid and some ancient pillars called the Needles of Cleopatra and Pompey. It had become a dirty city, unloved, like a once-beautiful courtesan degraded beyond even the artifice of paint and powder and perfume. Yet still came merchants here with their caravans, guarded by the archers of Arabia; from Cairo after travelling from Holy Mecca, they ended their camel journey at this port, where ships from many nations anchored to gather silks, camlets, rhubarb, sweet oils, cotton, Turkey carpets, galles, pepper, cinnamon, currants, almonds, sugar, bracelets, paper, and dyes. The water in the New Port to the left of the peninsula was very deep and great galleons could harbour safely there over lost cities, it seemed, for continually were the Turks diving and dragging up with windlasses on boats, blocks of jasper and porphyry to be shipped to Constantinople. On each side of this port stood a castle with cannon ready loaded; the castle on the tip of Pharos, that long island linked by a causeway to the land, was topped with a huge lanthorn as guide to ships; two hundred janissaries were barracked there to protect the beacon and city should enemy attack or should the slaves think to rise and steal a ship. Their cannon were trained on that narrow mouth, and a smaller castle opposite, with but a

garrison of eighteen men, trained its cannon also on that mouth, so that, should they both shoot together, the balls would arc and intersect and destroy any vessel that thought to pass, unless God should think to shield her as once He had shielded the Israelites from Pharaoh's horde.

This haven, Francis sighed to note, was beyond doubt one of the chiefest in the world. Hither came continually ships of all nations when permitted, and like all great trading centres, the inhabitants were polyglot under the mastery of Turks. Five buildings were set apart for Christian traders, protected by the French consul—save for the Venetians who had two houses to themselves—and they were shut in at night. At sunset the gates of these houses were locked and guarded, as they were locked all day on Fridays, that being the Turkish sabbath. Thus within stout walls could the Christians sleep without fear of robbers, and the Turks could sleep or pray and know that the enemies in their midst could never rise against them.

But Francis now had his back to the city as he worked in the yards; he had the salt wind in his nostrils and could listen to the peaceful comfort of waves soughing on mud. Eagerly in the morning would he welcome the coming of the guard that he might be led from the foul bagnio to the cleanliness of sea air, and even forget for the time that he was a slave.

Then in the yards one afternoon, while he stood up to rest his back and wipe his forehead, he saw a janissary looking at him with peculiar intentness, screwing up his eyes as if he sighted along an invisible gun. It was the man who had given Francis drink and food aboard the galley, so Francis smiled and diffidently offered his hand. But the janissary did not accept the hand, nor did he smile. He stood erect in his bright blue coat, both hands resting on the mouth of the barrel of his matchlock, the slowmatch twined like a snake about his left wrist, its charred head drooping. The high collar kept his chin up and the gaudy bird-of-paradise plume—mark of a veteran—curled behind him. There was no expression in the dark eyes nor on the full mouth under the monstrous moustachios, yet he was staring straight at Francis.

"I—I've been hoping to see you again," said Francis, flushing awkwardly before that unblinking stare. "I wanted to thank you."

For a long moment the janissary did not speak. He just stared and Francis shuffled from the stare. It was the regard neither of friend nor of enemy, yet there was curiosity in it. In such a manner might a man look on an unknown creature when seeing it for the first time.

"You are Francis Leland?" said the janissary at last in the lingua franca.

"Yea," said Francis.

"Master Fox told me of you. I saw you talking with him. He told me your name." He repeated it very slowly, as if savouring it and not certain whether he liked it or not: "Francis Leland . . . of Plymouth. The friend of John Fox."

"He was my father's friend," said Francis. "Not really mine. I was only a child when I knew him. You, too, are a friend of Fox?"

"I am a janissary," said the lad. "I have no friend."

"But you were so kind. . . . Don't go. . . . Tell me your name."

The janissary did not answer. What little colour was in his eyes seemed to fade, leaving them greyish, like a dove's. He stared at Francis, sucked in his moustached upper lip, then abruptly turned on his iron heel and strode away.

Francis watched him go, puzzled and angry. If the fellow wished to be insulting, why did he speak to him? Yet he had been kind aboard the galley and now, for some queer purpose, had singled him out, and he knew Fox. He must ask Fox about him.

But Fox knew nothing of the lad. When Francis questioned him, he sucked in his lip and plucked at his nose but he said he knew no janissary, save as a heathen with a gun. There was none with whom he was friendly. His name, of course, was well known, he had been here so many years, but, no, he knew no janissary for friend. You can't be friends with snakes, he said.

"But the fellow said he knew you. He said you gave him my name."

"Then he lied," said Fox. "What else do you expect from a heathen?"

"You didn't give him my name?"

"I tell you I didn't. Do you take his word before mine?"

"Nay . . . nay. . . . But it is strange. Why should he seek me out?"

"How can I tell? But of this, be certain—it was for no good. Be wary of the devil when he speaks in friendship. If you must wrestle like Jacob with an angel before you be fit for God's sight, how fierce must be your battle with the fiend? Get you to your work, lad, and forget the heathen."

But the heathen was not so easily forgotten. Francis had so little to think of now beyond his work and the dream of escaping, that small matters took on preposterous importance. And memory of that janissary persisted although he did not see him again in the yards. Somehow the fellow had discovered his name. Why? why should his name matter when the man had no apparent desire for friendship?

To the devil with him. . . .

But like the devil, he could not be exorcised by wishes only; the damned janissary returned in mind whenever Francis relaxed and let his thoughts meander. And always Francis was seeking him. He would find his glance flitting over the shipyards in search of the fellow, and whenever a janissary drew near, he would peek sharply at him in hopes of seeing again those pale eyes and dark moustachios. But always these were stranger-janissaries, mostly dark men, some almost black, although occasionally he noticed one or two with fairish looks.

Time, however, blurred memory and the stranger became almost forgotten while Francis strove to scatter his worries in work. Nor was that so difficult when the work was work he loved. And he was paid for it, being given a monthly allowance of six quarter-dollars with which he bought a little extra food, sweet cakes with almond flavouring or delicious pastries stuffed with egg and chicken. These, however, were luxuries, for his meals were sufficient: he fed with the soldiers, but while they were given five, he received but three loaves of bread a day.

He slept in the bagnio, chained, a slave for the night, but in daylight he was free, save for the gyves on his legs, and sometimes the guards would let him wander to the market to spend his little savings. Slaves were permitted to go there in groups, under guard, and at such times Francis's particular mate was Tom Finch whom he had known in boyhood. Finch also worked in the yards, for he was a skilled carpenter, and usually he worked beside Francis.

They had been schoolboys together in Plymouth until Finch had sailed off and vanished. That had been his first voyage, and his last. Scarcely had his ship passed the Strait of Gibraltar than the galleys had swooped on her, and he had been in Alexandria ever since. It seemed to Francis that the boy had not altered with the years. He had grown taller, of course, and more wrinkled, but his spirit was yet a schoolboy's, eager for sport, ever japing and jesting.

"How can you jape in this hell-hole ?" Francis asked him once when the lad had been making merry with some janissaries.

Finch looked owlishly at him. "What else is one to do?" he asked.

"Do you never think of your people, of your home?"

"I can never forget them." Great tears rolled slowly down his cheeks, and he sobbed. "I bet mother's giving dad whooping hell this moment! He was a placid man, my dad, and she could hit him with anything but an axe and he'd but grin, being pickled in wine and soused herring. I never knew if the wine gave him a taste for herring or the herring, being salt, gave him the taste for wine, for he hiccuped both on occasions. He was a belcher, he was. You could hear him belch a hundred yards, by gogs: a man, my dad!"

Tears yet glistened on his cheeks while he laughed ; and just as swiftly, Francis knew, with a word he could turn that laughter back to

tears. But because of this lightness of heart, he was Francis's chosen comrade, his laughter driving off those ghosts of despair that wrung his heart to tears when he was alone and thought of England. Then was he grateful to Tom Finch, for his droll wrinkled face and glittering eyes and the greasy yellow hair that fringed his forehead.

When under guard he went to the market, it was always Finch he asked to go with him, for the lad loved haggling with the merchants. The market was in the square near a small toppling pyramid. Here were leather-sellers, tailors, carpenters, perfumers, slipper-makers, candle-sellers, fruiterers, grocers and such. Their shops were not dissimilar from shops at home, being open to the street with the vendor inside, but Francis's interest was more in the passersby than in the goods for chaffer. And particularly in the women who were mostly negresses. These went often with tattered veils, being slaves with unsacred faces, and they walked with heavy feet, gaping into the wonders of the stalls, and a few of them were young. Usually they were fat and wrinkled, but nevertheless even then were they women, though they smelled sour to Francis. But sometimes, O, rarely, a slim much-perfumed wench would pass, her eyes glittering above the veil, eyes made brighter by the blacking of kohl on the lids.

And there were alleys that Francis longed to explore, alleys in which walked scented women with naked faces and limbs trained to move with libidinous suggestions; they smiled and nodded and bade even him, with his few miserable coins, approach. Usually in couples, arm-in-arm, these women languidly walked with a lilting roll of flesh, and some, to Francis, were beautiful. His body tingled at sight of their eyes against dark skin, and their red painted mouths. He saw men pass, laughing and chaffering, with them behind curtains over doors, and, being young, sudden exasperation at his slavery would make him wish to scratch down walls and break somebody's skull. Then did he realise that his spirit was parched with longing for women's company, and he cursed the youth he had wasted in playing with ships instead of love.

"Women!" laughed Finch. "They've got to hide 'em in this hot town, they're that likerous. That's why they veil 'em and make 'em wear breeches; they're so hungry for men like us. I was always a one for the wenches, I was, wasn't I, Frankie? D'ye remember little Moll who lived with her sister at the behind of the Spyglass? You wouldn't. You were all for ships and sailormen's lying tales, and not for doxies. But young though I was I wasn't so young as not to know what was done in the dark. I wouldn't mind this hell-hole if only there were some gallant girls locked in with us o' nights. These Turks have got no hearts for all their beards. It's cruelty, that's what it is, bestial cruelty, the way they treat us and lock up their dames as if we were dogs. Not that I'd touch any man's wife, even a Turk's, perhaps . . . but it's insulting to England. That's what it is. An insult to good old England! I'll have to

do something one day about it, and if that's mutiny, they've only got themselves to thank for it. And they should know better, too, with their heathen Mohammed who liked his houris, the dirty dog; and them with their hundreds of beautiful dames! and dames in this country are notoriously loving. Hundreds of 'em! hundreds, Frankie! All of 'em beautiful as a melon, perfumed, bedecked with gold and precious stones and jewels, and all of 'em loving, aching like cats for loving! Think of it, boy!"

"I wish I wasn't thinking of it!"

"I'm going to find a woman," said Finch, who had never spoken—nor possibly even thought—of women before, "even if I've got to turn Turk and marry the whore! Yea, I'll turn canting Moslem to get one, two, three. You can marry as many as you like! You know that, Frankie?"

"Even for fifty I'd not forswear God."

"Neither would I. Of course not. . . . But just think of it! Fifty of 'em all fat and lovesome and rolling in musk! I'm going to get a job in a harem."

"Turn eunuch?"

"What'd be the good of that, you mome? You know, I worked in a harem once, but the dirty dogs locked all their wives away; would you believe it! They've got no Christian in 'em, no trust, no understanding of honour. Yea, I had some carpentering to do, fixing some doors, and the fellow was so pleased I've been hoping ever since to get another like it. And I tell you, Frankie, if I do, I'll not stick to my adze. No, by gogs, I'll turn explorer."

"And be choked with a bowstring?"

"Worth it," said Finch, screwing up his eyes and spitting. "And if I do, Frankie, I mean if I get work in one of their joy-houses, I'll have you with me. You see!"

Francis laughed at Finch's earnest look. The man's lower lip was pushed out, his head was to one side and his eyes were twisted in their lids, as if already he saw before him an open harem stacked with beckoning pulchritude.

"All you've got to remember, lad," said Finch solemnly, "is that I've got a cunning Brain. You can laugh. But I know. I tell you, my own Brain startles me sometimes, the ideas it thinks of, just pops 'em in my head without me knowing. Things I'd never even have dreamed of. I just let my Brain think for me, and I'm telling you, it'll think us both plonk into a harem one night. Already I can hear it buzzing in my head. It says 'GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS,' plain as a raven."

"Then you'd better plug your ears, like when you hear mermaids, if you don't want your liver thrown to the dogs."

"Leave it to me," smiled Finch. "Leave it to my Brain."

Only too gladly did Francis leave such twitterings to Finch's Brain while he strove to reconcile himself to a womanless world. But knowing so well Finch's simplicity, a satanic simplicity that saw no obstacles even though they were mountains ahead, and his tremendous faith in his sly Brain, he could not help being vaguely frightened lest the fool think to burrow into a harem and be murdered slowly in some appalling Eastern fashion. Finch had always been that kind of a fool, weathercock to his Brain, even when a boy. You had but to dare him to do something, anything, and he did it, or tried to do it. They had once sent him to the top of a steeple, and there he had clung to the cross, a squealing sacrifice, too scared to scramble down until some sailors with ropes had rescued him, like bird's eggs from a cliff. Even in those days he had had the same faith in his Brain and had talked of and to it as though it were a separate entity; yet for all its alleged cunning, that Brain had never coached him in learning, and Francis doubted if he could write more than an X for his name to this day. No, it had never been that kind of a Brain.

It had been a Brain that said, *Go to it*, and the faithful Finch had promptly gone to it, with commonly most disastrous results. Once that Brain had ordered him to slide a lizard down the back of a girl's gown merely because it, not Finch—never Finch—had wanted to hear what her squeal would sound like, and quickly, it heard. It had told him to glue the pages of the schoolmaster's book together so that he might avoid the lesson. That Brain had been the evil prompter of poor Finch's boyhood, luring him to no sweet apple but to the crab-apples of disaster and thrashings, and Francis was alarmed to find that it was still active, still prodding the rogue to forlorn errantry, to the attempting of impossible prizes.

If it should lead to a harem, Francis was determined he would not follow. He would keep clear of the zany with the zany Brain, he swore.

Nor was that oath so difficult to keep, for within a few days, Finch left the shipyards, being ordered to work elsewhere, and Francis was at first delighted to have him gone, although he missed his cheerful irreverent company. Alone, terrors swooped and mastered him, alternately burning and freezing him, shivering his flesh and making his fingers awkward. They would catch him suddenly while he whistled at work and he would choke to think that England was but a short sailing distance off while he must remain shackled in this hell. At night, when he tossed, trying to lure sleep with different postures, memories of green fields and of Plymouth harbour with English ships and English sailormen brought tears that made him clench his fists and gulp down sobs. Then would he wish that he could die; then did he miss the laughter of Finch.

His only friends now were Crouch and Fox and a few other Englishmen, particularly William Wickney and Robert Moore,

who had been taken with Fox in the *Three Half-Moons* in '63. And they were all older than he and most had common interests bred in the companionship of years of slavery into which he could not enter. Besides, Francis was a little afraid of Fox; awed by his self-assurance and his faith in God, he would find it sometimes difficult to smile with him and his body would tremble as though he were a boy again before his schoolmaster. But apart from these few Englishmen were there none amongst the prisoners for whom he felt aught but casual interest. They gathered in groups and there was little real fellowship amongst them. Gentlemen adventurers, soldiers, sailors, thieves, all were in that bagnio, all slaves, yet even here the classes separated, the gentlemen scorning the others, the soldiers turning backs on sailors, sailors despising merchants. Those with trades were the fortunate fellows, artisans like himself who could build ships, and carpenters, joiners like Finch, smiths, rope-makers, sail-cloth-makers, locksmiths and coopers, who were all led to the yards or to their workshops and were quit of their despairs for a time in honest work. And they could get dainties by forgetting honesty and secretly selling what they could steal or could make in moments when the guards were not looking. Not only did they have more freedom than the others, but were given privileges, such as time off to visit the market, and cups of porridge on Fridays, the Turkish sabbath. But the gentlemen, those who drew their rags from the touch of the workers, Spaniards and Italians mostly, suffered terrible hardships, they and the priests and scribes and scholars and merchants, for the Turks despised them. They were used as rowers, but there were long winter months when the galleys were home, and then they were set to quarrying and to raising earthworks, carrying mortar and sand to craftsmen whom they despised. They were given only water and two loaves of bread a day to eat and had no extra money with which to buy food, and even at night they might be dragged out at any time at the call of anybody. They were the true slaves, these cavaliers and grandees, for their hands were useless for aught but holding swords while men they would have kicked out of their way when home, men they would not have thought worth even their killing, were now their superiors with better food and with privileges. Therefore the great men drew sullenly apart and talked together of God and of the splendours of the court where once they had pranced in velvets and gold chains instead of in rags and iron gyves, as now.

In the gloom of the bagnio they lived, seeing sunlight only through the high grilled windows when the galleys came home and they were unlocked from the oars, save when ordered to perform some humiliating task, even to cleaning gongs. Their one refuge was illness, for then they were taken to hospital and fattened for next year's galleys, being given soup and porridge as well as their usual ration of bread. But when strength returned, even the frailest of strength, back they went to the bagnio, to the darkness, to the days and nights that were

as one, to lonely brooding or subdued talk of the glories of what had been. If they died, their corpses were thrown to the prisoners for burial or were tossed to the fishes in the sea. No priest was there to give them their quittance to heaven.

Francis pitied but avoided them, knowing that it was useless to be kind to them, for any offer of food from such as he was scorned, even while they beat their bellies in hunger, as charity. Or they would snatch it without thanks, as if any gift was their right by right of birth, and would turn their lean scarred backs on the giver so that he might not see the frenzy with which they ate, like dogs, their jaws snapping as they bolted all in one gulp.

Now with Finch gone, Francis had none to talk to, save Fox and his friends, and their England was very different from the England he remembered, far more beautiful and generous, yet it was good to talk of it and to hear the tale of how the *Three Half-Moons* was taken, as his *Little Jesus* had been taken. She had been off to traffic with Spain at the port of Seville, manned by thirty-eight men, when near the Strait of Gibraltar eight galleys had rowed upon them, encircling them, so that they had no hope of escaping, as Francis had had no hope that tragic day when the wind was silent.

"Yea," said Wickney, "there was naught we could do but yield or be sunk, and we would not yield. The owner was a proud-stomached fellow who did not blench even to see his precious cargo in danger. He manfully encouraged us—God's blessing on his English heart—exhorting us to be valiant, while we waited with cold bellies and swords in our hands. And we fell on our knees and made brief prayers to God, then turned to see those galleys coming for the spoil, their mercy being but cruelty. So we primed our guns and stood ready."

"Then Grove stood up," said Fox; "he was our master and a comely man. He stood with his sword and target, and lifted them, smiling, in defiance. I can see him yet, his sword and target raised, and him smiling."

"Not only the master," said Moore, "but the owner, the master's mate, the boatswain, the purser, and every man stood up and smiled at one another. And the drums sounded, and the trumpets and flutes, and they'd have given courage to any man, but we did not need music."

"Not the master's mate, Bob," said Fox. "He was no man."

"You are right," said Moore; "he was no man."

They were silent, setting grimly to work again at memory of the craven mate, hammering as busily as woodpeckers.

"It was John Fox, our gunner, who was busiest," laughed Moore.

"Nay, Bob," smiled Fox.

"Yea," said Wickney, "it was John who was ever busy disposing of our pieces in order to the best effect for slaughter, and sending his bullets at the Turks. Yea, it was you, John."

"And they answered," said Fox grimly: "their pieces came thrice as fast as ours. But soon they drew near and their damned bowmen fell to their charge and sent forth arrows so thick amongst us it is wondrous we were not slain, each man of us. But we answered fast."

"Fast enough," smiled Wickney. "I warrant there were twice as many Turks slain as us Christians."

"But they discharged twice as fast against us," said Fox, "and for so long that the poor *Three Half-Moons* was very sore stricken and bruised under-water. Which the rogues perceiving they made greater haste to board us. But ere they did, God be blessed, many a Turk bought it dearly. They fell by dozens, by dozens. Yet in vain. For boarded we were, though they found it so hot a skirmish I swear they wished they had not meddled with that feast. For we showed ourselves men indeed, fast with our brown bills and halberds. Yea, the owner, the master, the boatswain and all our company stood to it so lustily that the Turks were soon dismayed."

"Chiefly it was the boatswain," said Moore; "he was a goodly man."

"Yea," said Fox, "a goodly man and very fierce."

"You should have seen him, Francis," cried Wickney. "He was most valiant above the rest of us. He fared amongst those Turks like a wood lion, for there was none of them that either could or durst stand in his face, till at the last there came a shot from the Turks and it broke his whistle asunder; it smote him on the breast so that he fell down, bidding us all farewell cheerily, and to be of good comfort, he said, and him dying, telling us to be yare and to win praise by death rather than to live, like this, captives in misery and shame."

"And so we would have done," said Fox, "but for the press and store of those accursed Turks; it was too great for us, we being so few. They overpressed us so that we could not wield our weapons, and thus were we taken though we would rather have died."

"Except the master's mate," growled Moore, and spat.

"He was a notable coward," said Fox, "and shrunk out of the skirmish, esteeming neither the valour of his name nor accounting of his example to his fellows, not even having respect to the miseries wherewith he would be put. A notable coward, indeed, was he."

"It was a gallant fight," said Francis.

"But the Turks were victors," sighed Fox, "yet they had no great cause to rejoice or triumph. It would have grieved the hardest heart to see those infidels violently treating us poor Christians, not having any respect for our manhood which they had tasted of, not even thankful for the booty. No remorse, no pity bridled their fierce tyrannical dealing. The dogs!"

"Yet it was a brave fight," sighed Wickney.

"Ay," said Fox. "And so we're here, Frankie, like you, no matter how gallant our fight. But," said he, glinting his eyes under lowered lids, "God will not be always scourging His children. So, take heart."

Always this hint of hope, always some whisper to keep faith in God, but never explicit details, and Francis was in too great awe of Fox to ask, although winter had come and the cold of December was on them, time passing, yet he was ever baffled by the man's cold amiability. Those pale eyes kept affection off, the lifeless smile in the greyish beard was not the smile of intimacy but rather of some satisfied communion within himself. He would stand, nodding his head, while Francis talked, but it never seemed he listened—or rather, it seemed that he listened to a voice in his own mind. He rarely lost his temper, so easily frayed amongst cooped-up men, but was for ever soothing argument like a too-tolerant parent of thoughtless children.

When Francis became impatient, swearing to escape at once somehow, Fox would smile exasperatingly.

"I used to feel like that—yea," he said.

"You don't want to escape?"

"Who said that? Not I. I but said that once I'd felt like you, with hammers in my muscles, now I have learned to wait. We shall escape in God's time. You must not be impatient."

"But when? When?"

"Mayhap," said Fox slowly, smiling, "in the winter."

"It is almost winter now!" cried Francis.

"Not yet . . . not yet, lad. . . ."

At such times, Francis had to clench his fists and lower his eyelids lest his exasperation master him and he curse the man.

"But why the winter? Why not now, now?"

"You talk too much," said Fox. He put his face close to Francis's, peering into his eyes. "How could I tell you secrets when you shout your heart aloud? Besides, you keep wicked company."

"Meaning Finch?"

"Yea. The boy is a natural. He is not even evil, he is a fool. He jests with the heathen and has not cunning enough even to hate. Ill company, lad."

"But he's not here now, he's gone. . . ."

"How can I trust a fool who seeks fools' company? You are your father's son; d'ye think I would speak to you otherwise? Nay, be not angry, or you'll regret it, boy. . . . If you would learn my secrets, keep far from fools like Finch. . . . And did I not note you speaking yesterday to that God-accursed renegado, Craven?"

That was true. Craven had come strutting to the shipyards in a yellow coat with a yellow turban on his shaven poll and with half an inch of beard on his long chin, and the rascal had boasted, with many

a wink, of the joys to be found in Mohammedanism. But Francis had merely smiled and taken small heed of the clown. He had but jested contemptuously with him for a word or two, never thinking that Fox was watching. He should have remembered that Fox was always watching.

"He was a seaman of mine," he muttered.

"All the more reason to kick him in the tail, to spit on him. But to speak friendly-like with such a beast, worse than a beast, betrayer of Christ crucified, a rat like that! . . . I can forgive an honest Turk, if Turks be ever honest. He is born with the corruption in his soul and knows no better, but for one bred in Christ to kiss the serpent of Allah! . . . I would stamp on them like beetles, I would crush them with my heel! They are accursed of the earth and there will be no hell hot enough for their burning. It is beyond even sin to deny God, 'tis so black, so foul and stinking a sin that there be no word vile enough for it. Yea, no word so foul as that foul sin, to deny God; for it is to spit on God in your very soul. It is to trample on God's face with muddy boots, to spit on Him, like that damned Jew who wanders endlessly, seeking the peace he'll never find, save when God relents enough to let him have a day to sit on an iceberg to cool his bottom. Even to speak to such a dog is to slime your lips. I would kill you—yea, you! much as I loved your father, I would kill my most beloved, if he betrayed our Lord! Even my own child with my own hands would I kill like an asp with its poison!"

He was sweating and shaking in his fury, and the words rattled in his throat as if they would not take form, while his skin darkened and the veins swelled on his temples. He gibbered at Francis, drooling in his beard, while his teeth chattered.

"Yea," he moaned, "even my own child would I kill! . . . But . . . but I have no child. I am alone. . . . Who spoke of children?"

"No one," whispered Francis, afraid of that fury; "no one spoke but you."

"I? . . . What did I say? . . . Peace, peace! . . . I remember. . . . But what made me speak of children when I have none?"

He seemed suddenly very old, his shoulders bowed, and there was almost a pleading doggish look in his eyes. Francis thought of Bessy Fox but dared not mention her. She was dead, Fox had told him, and mayhap the memory of her death was the reason for this frenzy. Best not to stir the embers of that pain.

"Strange . . ." muttered Fox. "The tongue is a weak member and that is why God set it between our teeth, so that we might bite on it when it sins. Have no fear, Frankie. . . . We will escape soon. Very soon."

"But when?"

"That is for God to say," said Fox with a slinking smile, and Francis felt then that he hated him. Was this talk of escape but a

madman's dream, after all? For God to say? How could Fox know what God was saying?

Francis kicked the sand, churning it with his toe, then he seized his adze and swung it. Mad, yea, the man was mad! . . . He had been led by madman's talk to hopeless dreaming. Better to trust in Finch's lunatic brain than in the God-drunken faith of John Fox. God damn them both. . . .

He swung his adze so wildly at the timber between his legs that almost he chopped himself. Mad . . . Would he, too, go mad if he was caged here long enough? for they were all mad in their different ways—Finch, Fox, all of them, all mad except himself; and now he was beginning to doubt even himself, and surely that was proof of madness?

CHAPTER V

SPEAK IN WHISPERS

ALEXANDRIA, founded by that young hero of the Greeks who had sworn to carve the world for his playground and have its peoples for his toys, had been built on the isthmus facing the stony Isle of Pharos, and later the Ptolemies had made of it one of the glories of the world, a city of which legends were still treasured and some were told to Francis by learned Turks for whom he occasionally worked. Splendid indeed must have been that city of ancient times! Here had Antony gambled his kingdom for love of tiny Cleopatra; here had the great Cæsar himself dallied with that notorious whore, as Plutarch told. Here had the seventy learned Rabbis translated the Septuagint; here had holy St. Mark ordained his first convert, a cobbler, as Bishop of Alexandria, and here had the saint himself been dragged through the streets, a rope about his neck, because he had protested at the worship of that heathen god, Serapis. His bones had been rescued by two Venetian traders who had hidden the relics under pieces of pork and had thus carried them safely to their ships and on to Venice, for the Faithful would not contaminate themselves with even the smell of that beast accursed by the Prophet.

In yet earlier days this city had been the most famous in the world. Its library had boxed over four hundred thousand manuscripts of patiently gathered wisdom, sufficient parchment to heat the public baths for six months when the Khalif Amir, fonder of cleanliness than learning, had dumped them in the furnaces. Here once had Archimedes scrawled his inverted pyramidal sums, and Euclid had worried himself with squares and triangles and angles and such; here Hipparchus had invented trigonometry, and Strabo had written histories, while Eratosthenes had studied and noted the march of the

stars through his long spyglass. Now pirates were housed in the home of the wise.

Alexander had plotted to raise a city that would be worthy of his illustrious name made wonderful with conquest, and it was said that his bones still lay here buried in some secret place. He had cut a wide street from north to south and had had other streets made running from it at right angles. From the Canopic Gate, where wealthier Turks now lived, this street reached the Necropolis, and was sliced by another broad street from the Gate of the Moon to the Gate of the Sun, both streets forming a cross. Alexander's palace now lay in yellow ruins. Fluted columns, statues of forgotten gods and goddesses, were buried under sand or pieces of them had been used to build the white boxes of Turkish homes. Gone, too, was that lighthouse, three hundred and fifty feet high, with its door fifty feet above sea-level that could be ridden to on horseback or by chariot, so gradual was the incline. There were said to have been three hundred rooms in that white marble lighthouse built of many towers, one on top of the other. Under its dome, pitch- and wood-fires had glared, reflected by mighty mirrors, for twenty miles at sea. And so fierce was the fire from this mirror that, men said, its concentrated rays could burn a ship down to the water's edge. On the tip of Pharos it had stood, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, until a Christian spy had whispered to the caliph that there was treasure buried under it. And the greedy Turk had torn down the real treasure in search of treasure that was not there. That lighthouse was no longer even ruins, for an earthquake had tumbled what remained, and the sea had taken all.

Almost all of that great city now was gone, the dream of Alexander, pupil of that ingenious wizard, Aristotle, dream of the wise Ptolemy called Philadelphus because he married his sister, lovely Arsinoe, and together, brother-sister-husband-wife, they had built the Home of the Muses, that museum of learning to which the wise had wandered from all corners of the world, and the artists, like Apelles.

That ancient city now was mainly ruins; only remained the obelisks of Cleopatra and Pompey, as they were called, with a few other smaller columns, while at their bases were strewn fragments of temples, broken columns like stumps of teeth sticking out of earth. It had become a city of ruins which a barbaric invader had not bothered to build anew, save carelessly with mud huts and stone houses plastered white, as if the spectres of Greek homes were huddling on their graves. But these Turks had no desire for permanence and the once wondrous city had become scarcely a town in size, its houses small and dirty, its streets ill-paved and sprouting weeds. Pirates had fouled its beauty, without intention, without hatred, but as monkeys might besmear a goddess, seeing small perfection in smooth skin beside their hairy shapes. But pirates were never men to dream of home or to raise houses for comfortable living. Gold was to them

to be squandered in a day's debauch because they had no future, no grave ahead save in the grottoes of under-sea.

Therefore did the once noble city lie broken, its pillars smashed, its temples wide to the heavens, its gods buried under earth. Only one portion of Alexander's dream remained precious and cared for—the waterside. Harbour walls ran parallel to the streets, and the built-up mole cut the water into two bays, the eastern one, the larger, being deep enough to take the greatest of ships; and next the smaller one to the west were the yards where Francis worked to clothe the skeletons of ships.

The disappearance of Finch heightened his gloom, for he missed the fool's jollity, although glad to escape the possibilities of being snared in some scheme of that most foolish Brain. Now, too, had he lost faith in Fox. Until that day when Fox had muttered of God giving them warning when to escape, he had had complete faith in him, for the calm voice, the steady eyes had exorcised all doubt. You could not question when faced with such assurance, such lack of doubt. But now Francis had seen the lowering of that mask and was appalled, like a child who for the first time finds his parents not omnipotent and all-wise. The future had become a frightening blank. How trust a man who trusted in miracles? They would rot here for ever if they were to rely purely on God's help. Even the Israelites in their wearisome march had needed the physical presence of Moses to keep them on their feet. The word of God alone was not sufficient, man must have it incarnated in man before he can believe. That was why God had sent His Son to earth. And man was yet ever searching for further manifestations of divinity in flesh, ever hoping that someone might speak with certainty and lead him to heaven. And Fox, to Francis, had spoken with such certainty until that day when he had mumbled of waiting for God's sign.

Now was Francis without faith and therefore naked to fears and despair, and he was also without companionship, and his loneliness was a great weight on his heart, making him sullen and irritable. Besides, Finch's chatter of harems and harem-fruit had conjured dreams and memories that he wished to forget. With eyes that were open on a world of men, he yet saw the girls of Plymouth. And when some muffled Turkish lass hurried past him in the street, he caught his breath and followed her like a dog in rut, in his mind stripping her of those concealing garments and tearing down that yashmak, wet where it had been sucked into her hidden mouth, to see the dark girl-face below. But he saw little of even well-hidden women, save for sneaking glances down the alleys where, bare-faced, they invited lechery with beckoning eyes. . . . He had never realised before that eyes alone could prove such magic of love. Only the hands of these women were human, their hands and eyes above the yashmak. Eyes in rims of kohl glittering, alluring, furtive. . . . No women

with naked face had ever set such poison in his veins as did those eyes of flittering phantoms in the street.

Try though he did to forget them, concentrating on carpentry and schemes of escaping, these dream-wenches were yet ever behind his eyes, ever waiting to pounce when he let his thoughts drift from the task in hand; they waited at night for him to try to sleep, for when he shut his eyes, they closed with the lids to torment him in dreams. Nor did those dreams vanish with the dawn; they lived in sunlight and often became incarnate in the hidden figure of some woman hurrying under cloth.

His body had conquered his soul. He had no control over himself, his body sweated and shook and he was helpless in its skin, and it burned his mind to futile angers, so that he would sit morosely in the bagnio while none dared speak to him. He jeered at his comrades' hopes and their despairs, he jeered even at Crouch who tried to comfort him, for Crouch had not forgotten the impatience of his own youth and its detestation of discipline. He jeered even at Fox.

"It is winter," he grinned tauntingly one day when Fox came to the yards, for being also a barber, Fox returned only to shipbuilding when his razor was not needed in the town.

Fox smiled slowly and his eyes were kind. "It is near winter," he said, "but in this heathen land, we forget the names of months, even the dates of years. Winter, mayhap; and yet the galleys are not home."

"You want the galleys home, do you? all the armed sailors and janissaries home?"

"I want the rowers home," said Fox.

Of course . . . the more slaves there were, the braver would be the mutiny. . . . Again, Francis felt his faith return. You could not doubt those pale blue eyes, that calm voice, yet he turned scornfully away when Fox said:

"They must all be home, all Christians, even papists, that our many voices may raise in a quire to heaven and God might hear."

Francis slouched aside and turned his back on Fox. The old cant! Would God give them keys for their irons? would He wet the Turks' powder and rust their matchlocks? His anger and despair made him feel ill and giddy as cold winds came from the north, and he shivered, even in sunlight.

"You must have faith," said Fox.

"I have faith now only in myself . . . and God."

"God is sufficient. You might forget yourself," said Fox.

Francis did not answer, fearing to lose his temper, for he felt his legs tremble with impatient rage while his hand so shook that it could barely aim the adze. Why must the fool ever bring God into it? Of course they would need God's help; without it they would be doomed; but God did not produce his old-time miracles in this sixteenth century. For the sake of a few hundred slaves He would

not kill the first-born of these Turks, not turn this adze to a serpent nor send buboes under the armpits of the bey. He would help only when man himself took action.

"You should not anger John like that," said Crouch when Fox had left them. "He is a godly man, and will be a Moses to us yet."

"Why then is he so muffled in his talk, hinting but never telling? I am weary of this sly chatter, wrapping God around each word. Chatter, chatter, but never doing. . . ."

"God forgive you," said Crouch, "as I do, for you be young and do not understand. I know John Fox. I knew him when he was a boy and a lad, and there was none more cunning than he, none so brave, none that I would trust as I trust him. Yea, if we were on Romish fires with the damned priests grinning to burn us, I still would put my trust in God and in God's strength in Fox."

"He only talks. . . ."

"Would you have him shout secrets when there are spies about? Even in the bagnio there are mayhap spies, villains so lost to God that they would sell their mates if it would give them favour in their masters' eyes. While age brings greater trust in God, it brings less faith in men. I'll not lash you with my tongue, as was my wont, for I know you be fretted with this slavery. And so am I. Mayhap my fret is just as great as yours, but age has taught me to keep strong chains on my impatience, to wear a mask when naught is to be got with tears and howling. Remember, you have been here but a few months while Fox has lived here fifteen years. Think of that! Fifteen years!"

"I'd rather die," said Francis, "than live here fifteen years."

"Yea, for you are weak. John was strong: he lived, and I thank God for it."

Francis knew that Crouch was right, that he was foolish not to trust Fox who had weathered fifteen years of this hell, but his exasperation with life was such that he could trust no one. There was a peculiar satisfaction in refusing friendship, in remaining lonely and ambitionless. Yea, ambitionless; for although he longed with almost physical pain to escape, he deliberately hurt himself by refusing even to believe in the possibility of freedom. But there were times when he gritted his teeth with shame at his ill temper and plotted how to make amends to those he hurt; but what amends could he make when his pride would not let him speak words of self-condemnation? He could but smile and try to be ingratiating with eager hang-dog look pleading forgiveness, especially with Fox, for Fox frightened him as his father had frightened him when he was very little, yet in a way, a fearsome way, he loved the man.

"If you would only put some confidence in me," he pleaded, "I would be different. It is this living in a bladder of air, feeling that there is life one cannot see or touch beyond the skin, that makes me sick. For the love of Christ, John Fox, tell me your plans."

"Plans?" said Fox. "Who spoke of plans?"

"But you're always saying, always hinting of some chance of getting out of this gong; yet you say nothing definite."

"What can I say?"

Francis shifted from that cold stare, from the faintly supercilious smile twisting the grey-black beard. "Just . . . give me some hope . . . some promise."

"Your only hope, lad, lies in God. I am of clay, like yourself. Put your trust in God and you will be saved. I'd have been crazed long since but for my prayers."

"My faith is in God," cried Francis, "but it is also in you, John Fox."

"And I am but clay. A weak reed for your faith, lad. And why should I put trust in you who every day seems less his father's son? Would your dad have moaned because the heathen had hooked him? Would he have moped at his work and turned sour-faced on those who would be friendly? You are curdling your own soul, boy, and God does not like offerings of that kind. You will be ripe for hell yet with your ill humours. You must straighten your shoulders to your cross and smile when the thorns bleed your forehead. Yea, you should be jolly that God tests you in this crucible. He is refining you, as wise men seek to make gold from base metals by heating them; they set them in furnaces like the furnaces of Nebuchadnezzar, that wrecker of Solomon's Temple, and the base metal becomes precious. For God is alchemist of men. In the fires of the spirit, in the torments of the flesh, does he distil heart's gold from its impurities."

"I . . . I try to be patient, but I am young and you are old."

"I, too, was young when I first came here and my sufferings were greater, far greater; I had a child. . . ." He set his lips in a hard line and lowered the lids of his eyes and was silent. "Yea," he whispered, "much greater, yet . . ." He lifted his head again and glared at Francis. ". . . yet I neither lay broken with despair nor taunted fellow-prisoners," he cried. "In that hell, my soul took strength. It did not weaken as yours has weakened. I kept my faith, that little flame, in my heart, and in secret I fanned it till it filled my whole being with the joys of God's love. And from this furnace I came whole, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, strong in my heart."

"I try," said Francis, "but my flesh is yet my master, I fear."

"All the greater then your conquest of it. I will pray for you, boy." He put his great hands on Francis's shoulders and gazed tenderly into his eyes. "Pray hard," he said; "and if your body torments you, revenge yourself upon it. Yea, even with knives, if need be. Put your hand in the fire and the pain will drive the devil out of your heart, for the flesh cannot abide suffering. It will shrink and shrivel and the soft-loving demons will flee."

That was the recipe for suffering given by the old Desert Fathers —to turn the mind from evil thoughts by hurting of the flesh. Good protestant though he was, Francis had yet heard tales of Romish saints from sailors eager to placate any force in heaven when the wind came keening over the skyline like Gabriel's ratchets out for prey. Those fathers had sought the desert, not merely to escape the presence of flesh but to meditate on God without disturbance. So an old Spaniard told him one night in the bagnio when shyly he questioned him about how the fathers had tamed desire like Jerome's lion. Some, weaker than others, the Spaniard said, had lifted themselves above the world on pillars, sitting for years in their own dung, close to heaven, like St. Simeon who had had not even a lizard for company but who had nevertheless converted to Christ a dragon that had clawed his pillar. But Francis had no desire to climb to the point of one of Alexandria's obelisks; nor did he wish to live, like some holy men, a lifetime at the bottom of an empty well. How else, he asked, could you tame the flesh when you could not squat on a pillar, burrow into the earth, or lurk in deserts? had the hermits no secrets to give a tormented English lad?

"No secret but in the spirit," said the Spaniard. "It was Dorotheus the Theban who said, many hundred years ago: 'I kill my body for it kills me.' In busy hands alone can carnal men find peace when they have not the gift of the spirit with which a few are blessed. And those desert fathers, lad, were not idle. When they were not praying, they toiled with their hands, for they said that a busy monk is tormented by one devil but an idle monk by ten thousand devils. The blessed abbot Paul would gather palm-leaves and make baskets, and after he sold all needful for sustenance, he would burn what remained of his year's work, so that he could start afresh and thus be never idle. It was close by here, in the desert, near the Nile delta, that those men lived."

"But did they conquer the flesh?"

The Spaniard sighed. He was lean and yellow-skinned but his eyes were bright.

"That I cannot tell," he said, "but to the end of their days those holy men yet struggled with the devil and, remember, the devil is in your flesh. That is why they cut their bodies or lived in tree-trunks, like some; or like others, welded iron hoops about their loins."

Francis shuddered. There seemed no answer, no short cut to heaven, no receipt for killing the devil within, save by one's own will, and he knew, most painfully he knew, his will was the flimsiest reed.

In cutting and bruising himself he found no alleviation of desire. He was made apparently of flesh different from the martyrs. Pain but made his temper more violent, and it was his temper which he most particularly wished to control, and even though he sweated with

the effort, he forced himself to be civil to others, to listen and not argue, to be courteous even to boors. And, strangely, the effort itself brought a certain peace and he noted Fox's approval. Not that Fox said anything, but there was a gentleness in his manner now when he spoke to him that had not been there before, and although there was still torment in Francis's dreams, the fires had cooled a little.

It seemed that, in time, he might yet find peace and his constant wariness, his ever watching to see that he did not misbehave, so absorbed him that he had little time to worry over small frustrations. Yea, he was learning a slight content when Tom Finch came back to the yards.

He had been sent to help build a house along the coast and his master had treated him so well that the lean lad had even become a trifle plump. Francis groaned to see him. Before, he used to welcome him, glad to be made jolly so that he could forget his worries for the moment, but now that jollity had the opposite effect. It made Francis discontented again. It destroyed the placid fatalism he had been building as armour for his spirit, and the imprisoned lusts returned. Finch chattered of women, of a black slave he had fondled on the coast; he talked voluptuously, smacking his lips as if she had been a pudding, tasty to recall, until Francis had to hold his breath to still his heart's swift beating.

"Quiet, mome!" he cried. "I don't want to hear your dirty japes."

"That's because you wish you were me," said Finch complacently. "But I'll not torment you, lad. Nor have I forgotten what I promised."

"What's that? what do you mean?" It seemed to Francis that there was ice about his heart as he glared at the fool.

"Why, about taking you with me when I get another harem to repair. There's one in the offing, too, I've been promised, or near promised——"

"I don't want to hear!"

"But this is in a harem, lad, a real live harem with live women——"

"Quiet!" cried Francis, lifting the adze threateningly, "or by God, I'll clip you one with this. And I mean it!"

Finch skipped from the bright curved blade flashing like glass in sunlight. "Nay, lad!" said he, "I know how you feel. . . . Don't be angry with me. I've never forgot my promise. . . ."

"It was no promise!" cried Francis. "And if you try to twist me in your sly games, I'll kill you. . . . D'ye hear me? I'll kill you!"

"All right, all right," muttered Finch, one eye on the adze, "I'll never forget. . . . My Brain never forgets. . . ."

Gasping, Francis leaned on the grindstone, and glared after Finch as he scampered off. The devil he had bound with such patience was fiery within his heart once more. Could but a word or two from such a zany uncoil the spring he had wound and thought secure? For now it sang within him and he tingled under his skin. The rascal

had been loving some fat sour-bodied negress while himself had been bridling his longings with such patient pride, bridling them in a bit or iron. Now, with a jest, Finch had undone all that slow painful labour that must be done again. And the fool still yapped of invading a harem! Not so much from fear of torture or death did Francis squirm at the thought, but because he feared temptation, like one of the fathers of whom that Spaniard had talked. Not his was the leathery skin of a St. Anthony who could meditate amongst posturing she-devils tricked out in all the perfections that Satan could conjure, and who could imagine female perfections to equal the lewd conjurations of that father of lust?

He turned furiously when he felt fingers grip his shoulders, thinking that Finch had dared return. But it was not Finch who stood beside him, it was John Fox. And Fox was smiling with a gentle affection that Francis had never seen in him before. There was love in those pale eyes and on that mouth.

"Nobly done, my boy," said Fox. "I have been waiting and watching to see how you would do when the tempter came back to spit his poison. I know that Finch. He was a boy aboard my ship and was taken with me. I have watched him all these years grow from child to man and yet he has remained a child. He is not fully fledged in evil for he knows not what he does. In the hands of a good man, he too might become good. But he is weak and this hot infidel land soon burns weakness into sin. I feared for you when I saw you were his friend. Now will I gladly take your hand. Come, give me your hand, Frankie, for you have shunned the devil's evil promptings."

Wonderingly, Francis put his hand in Fox's and felt light-headed joy in being thus accepted as this man's comrade. It was well worth the loss of Finch to become John Fox's friend.

"Walk with me," said Fox. "I will speak to the guard. Tell them you wish to go to the market."

"To go where?"

"With me," said Fox. "Tell them the market. It is no sin to lie to infidels. Come, lad."

Francis hitched up his leg-irons, tied them to a scarf and wound the scarf about his waist so that they would not clank between his legs and trip him. It was early morning and few were the shops open at this hour and few were the people abroad. Some were cleaning their houses, shaking mats and emptying pots into the street, and the air was sharp and rich with the smells of oils and spices that crinkled his nostrils when he sniffed, and he sighed at memory of all the noble meals he once had eaten and had thought but little of at the time.

Proudly, he trudged beside John Fox in his rags. Proud was he to be seen the friend of such a man, although none but Turks and

negroes noticed them. Their shadows dragged behind them, ridged in sand and mud, and the sky was of that blueness which becomes almost grey, as if the sun had sucked all colour out of it with its tremendous rolling heat, leaving it bleached like some worn old cloth from the washtub and beetle with only a memory of the blue that had once been dazzling. That blue was now washed from the sky that did not curve like an English sky, that enamelled comforting dome shutting one in with trees and birds and butterflies, but seemed to spiral off to immeasurable immensities.

The houses, mostly white, but some rose-pink, squatted at the road's edge, flat-roofed, seemingly hunchbacked, as if crushed in their growth by weight of sunlight. From within them echoed the stir of murmurous life, the rustle of clothing dragged over heads of yawning, hawking men and women, of bald-headed bearded men and of smooth-faced long-tressed women, in the secrecy of their bedchambers, in those sacred bedchambers of the Turk where women unclipped their veils, revealing noses, mouths, chins, throats, for one man's watching. Mysterious chambers were they to Francis where women stood stripped of veiling, uncoiling out of cloth like snakes, or being peeled like fruit by men's fingers for men's tasting. What were those Turkish chambers like? Not like an English room, he felt certain, with its tall curtained bed so that man and woman could pin themselves into a tiny pillowed chamber within a chamber, shutting the world away to nestle together in cosy darkness, breathing each other's breath and body smells. No: these Turks would lie on mats on those low pallets that were rolled up in daytime, and the walls most like would be painted—blue, he had been told, was the most common colour, but never green, the colour of the Prophet.

To Francis, the East meant wealth; he could not conceive the poverty within many of those white walls turning yellow now in sunlight; he pictured golden platters and heaped jewels and women in orange breeches trimmed with lace, with ropes of pearls from throat to knees, with gold bells on their ankles, gold circlets over insteps, their skin painted with arabesques. For of such were the tales that men whispered in the bagnio. There had been a wedding once on which one man had spied while working at a broken wall. The bride, this man said, had been smothered in jewels from top to toe, and those toes, he said, had been painted with henna, an imitation sandal being hennaed over the foot to the gold bracelets at the ankles. She had had necklace upon necklace around her throat, a tall collar of necklaces to uphold the tiny chin cleft with paint. Ear-rings and finger-rings glinted at every move and her eyebrows had been painted thickly to meet, one long black stroke, under which the eyes had glittered like a child's at thought of sugarmeats. She could barely move, the man told them with hushed voice, but had sat on cushions, like an idol, leaning a little her intricately ringleted head, as if listening

to music when there was no music, as yet. She had been sheathed in gold and jewels for some lad's bedding and she could not move until he stripped her. All luck to him! grinned the slaves : the lucky rogue. . . .

They were brides behind those walls now, all young and amorous, to Francis as he walked this morning with John Fox. Nearly all brown-eyed women they were, rarely did he see blue eyes above the veil, but mostly gentle animal-eyes, as the women glided like ghosts, brides of the afrit, those demon-men who whisper to women as the jinns whisper to men. All dark-eyed they were, their bodies a-gleam with henna, which is one of the trees of paradise and is therefore beloved of all good Moslems. They must be most beautiful : why else did men hide them, swathing all but eyes and slim brown hands?

But Francis set his lips as he walked, trying not to think of women, fearing lest Fox should smell his thoughts and turn with horror from him ; yet with whom else could he people these white houses if not with ladies beautiful in fantasy? He heard the clatter of pots, the crowing of roosters, and, from somewhere near, the subdued melancholy crooning of a negress. Some of the houses had high arched doors, many of them grilled with ironwork, and here and there, flat pieces of wood projected with crumbs on them for birds. Lazy-limbed storks floated above and now and then clacked with their beaks as if impatient, as if warning other birds to give them room in the boundless sky, floating to their nests in trees, on roofs. Sea-birds circled in aerial dances while the wind came cold from the north, making mockery of the hard light, so that Francis pressed his arms to his sides while he shivered.

Covertly he glanced at Fox who walked with hooded eyes, deep in thought, the straggling grey-black beard matted far down his chest, Watched thus in profile, it was a face such as one saw on alabaster figures on an English tomb, the face of some old knight, the alabaster yellow and seeming transparent and almost showing the bone. Thus was John Fox's skin, although deep brown, not yellow ; but it had the same unearthly glow that made one, seeing the carven figures, falter at thought that these men slept in God's sleep and were not stone. Fox, too, seemed in God's sleep, his skin glowing as if a candle were beneath it, and his eyes were pale under lowered lids, as if blind. A handsome rogue, thought Francis; women must have loved him when he was young.

But he could not think of Fox as lover, rather as a leader of men in battle or out for adventure on the Spanish Main, waiting like Drake for the treasure-train to come with tinkling bells from the Isthmus. No common emotions, such as love, could weaken such a man. And Francis felt humble beside him and proud to call him friend. He did not ask where they were going, for he had long since given up asking Fox anything, but walked quietly beside him until they turned into a narrow lane.

They paused before a tavern. Surely this was not some drinking bout they were to attend? Nay, not John Fox! but Francis licked his lips at thought of wine he had not tasted now for many, many months.

Although wine-bibbing was forbidden the Faithful, the Turks scornfully permitted it to be imported for foreign merchants and for men of the French and Venitian consulates and for those Christian slaves who had saved or begged dollars enough to liquefy. Besides, taverns sold also the thick syrupy sherbet permitted by the Prophet, for it was not intoxicating, and vinegars and various salts and sauces.

Fox pulled aside the soiled mat over the door and Francis followed him down a passage and into a small room that giddied him for a moment with its heat and stink of over-sweetness, as if it housed exotic flowers.

Before a large brick furnace that took up nearly half the chamber sat a bullock of a man, neckless, chinless, waistless. He seemed a block of almost raw meat capped with a little head shaved in Moslem fashion while the square black beard reached over the chest like a bib. He was on his knees on the floor, blowing at the fire, and he turned suspiciously with bright brown eyes to his visitors.

"Ah! eet ees Juan!" he cried in broken English, leaping to his feet and seeming to bounce on his short legs. He caught Fox to him and loudly kissed him. "You mus' no' mind all these steenk," he cried. "Eet ees the brew, the great brew. Wait till you taste eet, you will cry *Arrah!* and kiss wid your lips, boomp, boomp!"

He darted into a corner, fumbled with bottles, then returned with three clay cups filled with pale fluid.

"I dreenk to you," he said.

"One moment, Pete," said Fox. "You must meet my young friend. This is Francis Leland, Pete; and this, Frankie, is Pedro Unticaro. You should be friends, being both friends of mine."

"We freends," cried Peter, bowing, "*sí, sí*, freends!"

Slowly they drank the wine, nodding at one another and shaking their heads with approval. It was, Francis found, a delicious wine, somewhat like brandy, yet leaving a tartly sweet taste on the tongue.

"Please to meet freend of Juan," smiled Peter, and Francis could not help but smile in return, no more than he could have resisted patting a dog that had danced to him. For all his bulk and his bald head, this Spaniard was strangely childlike, but that, thought Francis, might have been because of his babyish lisp and the imperfect English he preferred to the lingua franca.

"I mak' that meself," said Peter, belching. "Like eet, eh? It make you craze, eh? Cum, cum, dreenk. . . . There ees more here even than yo' could dreenk. Even more than yo', Juan." Then he leered and winked, nodding at Francis. "Thees boy, what's he know?"

"A little," said Fox, "but not all. He is safe, but we must speak in whispers for there are ears in the street. He is the son of an old

friend of mine. And being young he is impatient a little. He's not been here fourteen years, like me."

"Me," said Peter, "I haf been here now thirty year! Same as you, only near three times more, eh? What ees fourteen! Eet ees a dog's life. *Sí*, that ees dog's life. Fourteen year. So I have lived a dog, three time! Now I will live a man, eh?"

He roared his laughter, slapping his thighs, then he seized Fox by both shoulders and kissed him on the cheek.

"Ah, my beloved!" he cried. "We are so ole freen's we can yoke, eh? Yoke and laff at each other. We no mirror to laff in. We look at each other and laff. Ees that not so, Juan? . . . But we mus' be solemn, we mus' dreenk no more or your frien' go muzz-muzz in head, him so young. I am pleased to meet him, thees young frien' of Juan."

Francis bowed and sipped again at his wine. "I am pleased to meet you, too," he said.

"Me, too," said Peter, "verra pleased."

"He is a roistering cock-a-whoop of a lad," said Fox, smiling. "He would steal a boat if he could and sail off to-night. Yea, the rogue would break out of this pleasant place and leave all the nice kind Turks, he would. Yea, and I'd no doubt, he'd leave his mates as well."

"Never!" cried Francis, reddening. "How can you say that!"

Fox grinned complacently as if the insult had been brilliant wit while Peter laughed until his belly gurgled and he choked. Then suddenly Peter became serious and sat down on a bench while he waved his guests to cushions on the floor.

"True," he said, "there ees too many, too many. They talk, they pray, they boast, they lie, they do nottings. Why take theem, eh?"

Said Fox quietly, "I leave no Christian in this hell-hole. Even Romans like you, Pete, are coming with me. Not one that loves Christ stays behind. What would you have thought of Moses if he'd fretted about which of the Israelites he'd have along with him? Nay, if I remember the Holy Book—which you Romans aren't allowed to read, so you wouldn't know, Pete—but unless I misremember, God made no arguments about who to take. He called out *Moses, Moses*, from inside that burning bush that never burnt, and He said, He said something like this—'I've seen the affliction of My people,' He says, 'and I know their sorrows, so get you going with them while I plague the Egyptians.' That's what He said, nothing about leaving those that talked and did nothing. He said take the lot, good and bad, for they're Christians, however rotten their souls might be. He just said, 'I am Jehovah and you do what I tell you.' And Moses did as I'm going to do, even if the waters don't open for me. Anyhow, this is the Mediterranean, not the Red Sea."

Peter wriggled on his great bottom, face growing purple while words rose in him. Then when Fox, his eyes afire with exaltation, paused a moment, Peter cried:

"Leaf them! leaf them be'ind! Why tak' scum with us? why? Neffar can I unnerstand yo', Juan! *Sí, sí,* I know, yo' are the good man, yo' will save all their dirtee skins. I would keeck them myself."

Stubbornly, Fox waggled his head, his eyes bright but hard.

"No," he said, "I take the lot—or none, I tell you. Yea, I'm not sneaking off. They're all coming with me, the brave with the rats; and like Moses in the desert, I'll pipe my psalm to God. Yea, like Moses will I sing! Would that I had the Good Book here that I could sing like Moses and make you burn with the glory of those words. My memory is brief, yet I should remember, for ever my mother sang it to me, for she'd the fear of the Lord in her, and while she worked, she sang the Song of the Israelites. Yea. Yea. A goodly song, would that I could remember all the words. . . . I will sing unto the Lord, Moses cried, for He has triumphed gloriously. The Lord is my strength, He is my God, my father's God and I will exalt Him. Yea, above all, will I exalt Him, for the Lord my God is a warrior, the Lord is His name. Pharaoh and his chariots and his men has He sunk in the waters, to the bottom like stones they have fallen, he and his captains and all his men. Thy right hand is glorious, O Lord, and has dashed into pieces the scum, Your enemies. With the blast of Your nostrils the waters have gathered together, the floods have rose upright in one heap, yea, O, Lord, and the depths are congealed in the heart of the deep. The enemy said, I will chase them, I will overtake them, I will divide the spoil, my lust shall fatten on them, I will draw my sword and my hand shall destroy them. But You did blow with Your wind, Lord, and the sea covered them, they sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto You, O Lord, amongst gods? Who is like to You, glorious in holiness, fearful in worship, doing such wondrous wonders!"

He was on his feet, almost on his toes, gazing up, fists clenched, and his voice in that tiny room was the voice of a prophet, terrible, reverberating, seeming to Francis to shiver on his heart. Francis could not move, could scarcely breathe, like a man cataleptic before a miracle. Gone were all doubts. Fox was God's chosen. He was another Moses and would lead the faithful from this sinful land of the Pharaohs; for was this not Egypt? was not this the same land in which the Israelites had made their bricks with little straw? Yea, they were the modern Israelites and John Fox was Moses.

"In Your mercy," cried Fox, "You have led Your people whom You have redeemed, You have guided them in Your strength unto Your holy habitation. The people shall hear and they shall be afraid, sorrow shall be on the peoples of Palestine and the Dukes of Edom shall be amazed, the mighty men of Moab shall tremble, all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall

fall upon them. By the might of Your arm they shall be still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over."

"Amen," said Peter and crossed himself.

"Amen," whispered Francis.

"Amen!" cried Fox and turned to smile at his friends. He cleared his throat and spat. "Some more of your kill-me-dead, Pete," he muttered. "Talking of the Lord makes one mighty dry. It was the Lord's doing, making me remember His words, having my mother always sing them, for the Lord plotted this task for me. Have no fear, brothers, I will lead you out of bondage."

"I have no fears," said Francis.

"Neffar do I haf fears," said Peter, spitting as he passed a leather bottle to Fox, who drank thirstily. "Take the scum with us. What you say I do. I am trusted here. I haf been giffen this shop, I sell, I live, somehow; I no die. . . . But O, I canno' bear it no more. I mus' go, I hunger and sweat for Andalusia. I am tired. But I do no' want to save all them rabbles. I theenk—damn theem!"

"I take the lot," said Fox, "or none."

The giant Spaniard shrugged his shoulders. "Then we tak' the damn' lot," he said with a grimace, "the whole damn' lot. Scums. I speet on theem."

"You have all ready?" asked Fox.

"*Sí, sí,*" said Peter with a sly glance at Francis. "I haf all ready. I jus' wait. I am the Israelites, you am Moses. I wait."

"Good," said Fox, "it won't be long to wait. . . ."

Not long to wait for freedom! . . .

When they left the tavern and trudged back to the shipyards, Francis could have sung aloud, so huge was his joy. He grinned at the blinding white walls, no longer prison walls; he grinned at the shrouded women, for would he not soon be seeing the naked faces of English girls? He grinned for the joy of being young and strong, of being alive, and of having a comrade like John Fox, Moses of Alexandria; for Francis never doubted that Fox would lead the slaves to freedom. It would have been blasphemy to doubt. And now looking on that strong face, bright eyes, broad brow, sharp nose above the grey-black beard, there was no doubt that this was Moses in an English skin; and if Fox were Moses, Francis would be Aaron. But he would build no Golden Calf. Nay! yet he would kill the fatted calf when he reached Plymouth and the largest share of that calf would be laid before John Fox, Moses of Alexandria.

CHAPTER VI

MISCALCULATION OF THE BRAIN

THE galleys were coming home, were being drawn up into the yards, covered with tarpaulins, were dragged into sheds, safe from winter storms. They were locked securely within walls, dismasted, sails stowed away, the oars stacked in sheaves and roped together. For the remainder of the season, Christian ships could sail the Mediterranean and the Levant in peace, with only wind and wave for enemies, although those could often be enemies perilous enough in this landlocked sea—storms from Crete, tempests in the Adriatic, whirlpools near Sicily and Scylla, rain-storms from the north-west, icy winds keening down the Alps and out of the Rhone valley. But none of these could equal the terrors to Christian sailormen of the threat of dark pirates stealing out of Algiers or Alexandria. The worse the weather, the safer they felt, for open galleys were helpless in wild seas. Therefore, the pirates slept, like snakes, through the dangerous months and Christendom could trade in peace along the Barbary Coast. Dusky sailors and soldiers returned to wives and concubines and set to right merrily to melt away their gold on pleasure. Locked behind doors, they couched on women, and many, too many, defied the Prophet with cellars of wines and other heady liquors. Only the janissaries, who, like the Christian Knights of Malta, were forbidden to marry, kept the same discipline winter or summer, guarding the port and the bey; but they were guardians to be watched sideways in slinking fear, being the true owners, by right of arms and insolence, of the city. Should they rebel, they could, like the Prætorian Guard of ancient Rome, tear their masters from their divans by their beards.

Slaves were locked fast, and those who had no trade simmered near to madness in the dark. The place was packed and, being barely ventilated, the stench was sufficient to choke one at times. The men huddled tightly together, chained, some trying to earn a few pence by carving old bones and pieces of wood into the shape of spoons and toothpickers, never into the images of men or women, for that was forbidden, like wine, by the Prophet. Day and night, the prisoners grumbled, dicing with bone dice, playing with cards painted on thin wood, squabbling with one another, and often even fighting. There were times, in winter, when memories drove some mad when they thought of wives and children, and a poor wretch would hang himself in his shirt; nor would his friends prevent him. It was a sinful escape, but who could cast blame? Not they, for there was not one amongst them who had not himself at times longed for death as for a lover and had schemed out ways to die.

This winter, Francis was appalled to awake one bitter morning to find feet almost tapping his face. They were the unwashed feet of a boy. He had been a pretty boy, an Italian, with cheeks soft as a girl's and with a girl's curled underlip. Now he hung over Francis in the dark and his feet revolved slowly round and round to the twist of the rope in a faint wind from the grille.

Francis muttered a prayer but he could not judge the boy who had been driven to this shameful death by the lusts of the fat Master of the Roads, the harbour-master, who had been ever fondling him as if he were a girl and squeezing his fingers down his shirt. The rascal's love was such that he had sworn to make the boy a Turk and had had him forcibly circumcised, and again and again with subtle tortures had he tried to make him repeat the oath of the faithful that would have doomed him to Islam. Stubbornly had the boy refused, for he had been a good Christian, once well tended by a Christian mother. So he had hanged himself.

John Fox cut the body down and he swore that he would have the boy given a Christian burial.

"It shall be done," he told the men of the bagnio. "Let not this poor soul go to hell because a Turk's lust drove him there. It was the Turk, not his own hands, that hanged him. He was a Roman. Is there not one amongst you who knows the burial according to the Pope's faith?"

And one who had been a clerk took the body and cleansed it and prayed by it and did all that was rightful to prepare the dead in Roman fashion. But John Fox, for once, failed to keep his word. He saw the Master of the Roads and told him of the poor lad's shameful death. He dared not accuse him to his face of murder, as he explained to Francis. He could not risk losing all privileges when the plot was ripe; for it would have been madness to abandon the plot and the probable salvation of hundreds of Christians for the sake of one, and he dead. But he had been as bold as he dared, telling the rascal of the poor boy's piteous end.

"And the rogue but smiled and plucked his beard." Fox's face was white and his hands trembled. "Why did not God strike him then? If I'd but had the power of Moses, he'd not have risen from his cushions! The fat fool sat and smirked as if proud of murder. Yea, proud of murder!"

"What did he say?"

"Said that the boy was a renegado, said that he had taken the oath, the liar, and had then forsworn the Prophet. It was, the villain said, the revenge of Allah on his apostasy. Let the dogs eat him in the streets, he said, he would not let the child have burial."

"Then what's to do?"

"Naught," muttered Fox, and trembled. "We can do naught, for should we rise now it would be before time. Nay, nay, we must chew down our rage. Be calm."

But it was difficult to remain calm when the Turks came to take the body. The slaves muttered together, rattling their chains and spitting, but the Turks took no heed. They gathered up the small corpse and one man threw it over his shoulder, and marched out. The boy's head dangled down, arms swinging, head lolling, face swollen and black, and there were purple marks about the throat. But the slaves could do naught. With shame, they stood, bowed, helpless.

"I will kill that Master of the Roads," said Fox.

"It is winter now," pleaded Francis. "When do we go? when? John, please—why wait? I am hot with rage at that boy. Now is the moment. These men would do anything, they would not care. They would pull down the bey's palace with their hands, stone by stone, if you gave the word."

"Nay," muttered Fox, "we must wait. The last galley's not home yet. I have sworn that I will take all or none. Do you think Moses left a man in Egypt? How could I let some poor devils come sailing back to this hell to find us gone? That would be a traitor's act, it would be black betrayal. And the Turks would torture them; ay; and many of them better fellows, mayhap, than you or me, Frankie, men who have been here longer than us and have withstood all temptations to turn Moslem or to hang themselves like that poor boy. Ah! but I'd like to slice a few renegado throats before we depart. . . . Yea, That would be godly work and sweet unto our Lord . . . rats like your friend, Craven . . . yea, yea, . . . and that harbour-master . . . Master of the Roads, he calls himself, and rightly so, for are not suicides buried at crossroads? . . . Yea, yea . . ." His eyes were like glass and his head was low. Francis could barely hear his words: "Master of the Roads . . . O, but wait. . . . wait, son, just a little . . . wait . . . Then, by God, we'll have a vengeance worthy of the Lord."

Francis knew the uselessness of argument when Fox fell into one of these ecstatic moods, but that boy's death had shaken him and he felt that he could never sleep again in this accused bagnio. When he lay down he would see those feet turning ever slowly above him. . . .

"They may be lost at sea," he cried. "There have been high winds lately, and pirates are sometimes sunk. I sank a galley myself before they took us. Let us go now—please, sweet John."

"They are Christians, too," muttered Fox. "Each man in those galleys has defied the hell-hounds, refused to renounce Jesus, and he deserves to live in freedom. I'd not sleep easy unless all came with me."

"But there are hundreds—two hundred, at least!"

"The greater the harvest for God. These men are martyrs, son, and would you not pluck a martyr from the fire, had you the chance? They are God's children and I swear that I will save them, too, or die."

There was no arguing with John Fox. He was in one of his Moses-moods and, Francis felt, was quite capable of suddenly producing another Ten Commandments from out of his shirt, and the first of those commandments would unquestionably have read; *Be Patient.* The full ten would have been merely variations on that theme—*Trust Me, Don't Argue with Me, Never desert a Christian, Do what I Say, Don't ask questions, Kill All Harbour-Masters, Don't speak to renegados, Keep Praying,* and *Remember I am Moses.* He seemed to live most of his time on some imaginary Sinai, preparing to sprinkle the blood of the covenant. No use in arguing. . . . Fox would do nothing until the last galley was beached, the last Christian locked into the bagnio; and without his aid it was impossible to act, for he alone knew every detail of the plot. All the slaves suspected that an attempt was soon to be made—they seemed to have smelt it, for none had talked of it, and few were in the secret. Even those close to Fox knew only each his own part, the plot in its entirety was secret to all, save to Fox himself; even Pedro Unticaro did not know every detail, and Francis himself had been told nothing beyond the fact that sometime an escape was to be attempted.

He saw little of Finch these days. The lad avoided him, and Francis was glad of it, for he had no interest whatever now in women, all his energies being concentrated on the dream of home. Yet he knew that Finch was plotting something undoubtedly dangerous. Now and then the rogue would grin at him or wink, but Francis took no heed. He dared not speak one word to the Bedlamite, knowing how Fox despised him, and, above all, he feared to lose Fox's friendship, for Fox meant freedom. Nay, he was well rid of Finch, for the fellow was stark mad, although one of the most cunning joiners that Francis had ever known. He could fit the timbers of a stern-galley to withstand the batterings of the most ferocious seas, but his cunning lay only in his fingers and there was little or none in his head. No, he must keep clear of Finch now that escape was close.

Then one morning as Francis was preparing to go with Fox and Crouch to the shipyards, four janissaries entered the bagnio and called his name and Finch's.

"What is this, Frank?" asked Fox.

"I don't know." Francis felt the blood leave his cheeks and his heart beat fast when Finch sprang spryly beside him. What had the knave plotted? for he did not doubt that this sudden call was of Finch's contriving, and he sweated when he remembered his careless chatter of women and harems. "I know naught of it," he muttered with miserable anger.

Fox strode to the janissaries. "What do you want with these men?" he demanded.

One of the janissaries smiled under his villainous moustachios.

"Do not fear, friend Fox," he said. "The bey is building further in his seraglio and he has chosen this Finch to do the carving, for he is skilled at such work. Of the other man I know nothing save that this Finch said that he was cunning at the work and that he would need his help. Therefore am I ordered to take them to their tasks. That is all I know."

"But I've work to finish in the shipyards!" cried Francis.

The janissary shrugged. "It must wait," he said. "You must come with me to the palace."

Francis looked helplessly about him, then raised the irons so that the janissary could unlock them from his wrists. His impulse was to throw them into Finch's smirking face, but he realised the stupidity of such a gesture. It would merely earn him a flogging, and when he had the rascal alone he could handle him, and he swore to do it, as he deserved.

"Come," said the janissary.

Francis kept his eyes down and would not look at Finch as they marched through the streets with the janissaries, their leg-irons clinking at every step. He dared not look at him lest he hit him. His face prickled with rage and he trembled at thought of how he'd beat the rascal when he got him alone. They were going to the bey's seraglio, perhaps to his harem. Please God, he prayed, that the women be well locked away! And all because of that afternoon when he had foolishly glanced down a narrow street and seen the bare-faced harlots beckoning at their trade. He should have realised that Finch was mad and that one had to be as wary with him as with a child who took casual comments for profundities and misinterpreted one's daydreams for actuality.

Flushed with anger, Francis turned his head so that he might not see the grinning varlet, and he looked into the eyes of the janissary who had been kind to him aboard the galley and who had spoken to him in the shipyards. The man quickly turned away, as if not wanting to be recognised, and reluctantly Francis did not speak, although eager to question him about that claimed friendship with Fox which Fox had repudiated. This was not the moment, however, for confidences, with stranger-janissaries listening and with mad Finch's ear cocked to misunderstand whatever it overheard.

Therefore, Francis held his tongue and kept his head erect so that he might not see the man on either side of him—smirking Finch and solemn warrior. He looked at the familiar houses, the plaster of some turning scabby, seeming mildewed with musty grey and an obscene brown. The people were awakening to the crying of the muezzins from minarets. Red-eyed negresses gathered yawning at the doors, chattering about their masters and mistresses, most likely, kerchiefs swathed like turbans on their woolly heads. Some milky

ibises seemed to float slowly like clouds, lean legs tucked under them, while a stork fluttered to a housetop, giving its unoiled-sounding melancholy cry. Women bakers were placing their trays of hot bread on the ground and were squatting beside them. Some were young and their faces could be clearly glimpsed through thin, ragged veils. Few troubled to look up at the prisoners passing with their guard, and when some poor crippled wretch darted from an alley and tumbled amongst them, the janissaries placidly clubbed him aside as if he were an animal; they kicked him with their iron-soled shoes and left him to groan and bleed in a doorway. For these janissaries were like mighty lords, the knights of Islam. Superciliously, they held high their shaven chins and their eyes were hooded under the brimless tall white hats with their bird-of-paradise plumes.

Reared in monkish seclusion, trained from childhood in military, musical and religious exercises, they had become a kind of ferocious aristocracy and despised all other folk. But Francis had noted that in many ways they were more human than the Turks whose pity seemed to be only for birds and animals in obedience to the Prophet, for the janissaries were rarely brutal to the slaves, treating them indeed with no more contempt than they treated Turks, their theoretical masters. So superior were they, so assured of their own strength and wisdom, of their salvation by that warrior Prophet who loved men of the sword, that they looked with scorn on others as being little above the beasts. Naught, save treachery, rebellion or the whiff of cannon-smoke, or the singing swing of a sword, was of importance to them; naught but the words of the Prophet and the laws of their own officers would they obey; therefore, being masters of earth and the future heroes of Paradise, they treated those outside their barracks with the contemptuous tolerance of a man to a dog.

Pride was in the lift of their chins and in the upthrust underlips, vanity in the thick perfumed and greased moustachios, and in the cleanliness of their apparel. A long sword curved at each man's side, drooping from the sash about his waist: it was different from a European sword, Francis noted, being very broad towards the point, broader than under the quillions, the opposite to tapering Christian weapons. Over the warrior's right shoulder hung the long-barrelled matchlock with its curved stock, the metal beautifully chased with flowery arabesques, and the slowmatch was wound like thick cord about the right wrist. They marched now in the morning sunlight with no strict formation, almost slouching along, but Francis noted the rhythmic ease of their stride. They were like animals.

Yea, even this strange brown man who had been friendly was but an animal, cut off from the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, doomed more deeply to hell even than the Turk because he had forsworn his baptism. A thousand boys a year did the sultan demand as tribute from a conquered country, and his kingdom now sprawled far into Europe; for these lads, being uprooted when so young, were above

family conspiracies, having no wives, no heirs for whom to plot, and were therefore trained to hold high positions in the State.

From the age of ten the rootless boy became a novice and was bastinadoed into learning under male-jealous eunuchs; he lived monkishly within the palace, seeing no woman while he studied humility, honesty and courtesy, being trained to lower his eyelids and to keep his arms folded on his breast in a pose of scornful obedience. At sixteen, being considered sufficiently humble and well thrashed into courtesy, he rose to what was called the second chamber and studied Turkish, Arabic and Persian literature, and was released from school only to be trained at dart-throwing, horsemanship and pike- and lance- and sword-drill. Now, body hardened, spirit strong yet humble before the glory of Allah and the wisdom and military genius of Mohammed, at the age of twenty the erstwhile Christian and now fanatic Moslem entered the third chamber of the gentle arts: needlework, embroidery, skill at musical instruments and the subtleties of arrow-splicing, the deft cunning of hairdressing, gentle manicuring and the grooming and physicking of beasts and birds. Now was he rid of early restraints, emerging from his monastery of learning, and allowed to chatter and laugh and sport with his friends.

Few, however, were those who passed each grade of the strict curriculum, and those who did achieve the third, this ultimate chamber of knowledge, were rewarded with gowns of cloth-of-gold and-silver and were dressed in satins and silks. They became the officers of the sultan, his ministers, his sword-bearer, his barber and manicurist, his keeper of the pet animals and birds, his stirrup-knight and master of his wardrobe, his chamberlain and butler, his page and squire, sleeping in his sacred bedchamber, two always standing by him with torches while he slept. Those who failed to reach this final chamber were given lowlier tasks, clerkships and butlerships, while the great majority who remained in the first chamber and could not climb out of it became warriors, janissaries. These were the guardians of Islam, and only the Knights of St. John on craggy Malta had as yet ever defeated them and the other warriors of Islam in open battle. And of these warriors there were others even more dangerous than the janissaries—there were the *delis*, fanatics of Allah who dressed in lion- or bear-skin, the hair outwards, and fitted their heads into leopard-skins with eagles' wings attached and had eagles' wings on their square curved shields; there were the half-savage Tatars tamed from the steppes; and there were the Turkish troops themselves. But courageous though these warriors might be, boasting like the *delis* that no enemy had ever seen their backs, the janissaries remained the real strength of Islam: cool learned monkish warriors who knew not fear.

They did not seem human to Francis, yet there was this young man at his side who had pretended friendship with John Fox. What friendship could a devil have with Moses?

The bey's palace stood on Ras-et-Tin, the promontory slicing the harbours apart. The walls were of the same white as ordinary houses but beyond the walls rose turrets and cupolas and the fronds of palm-trees. They entered through a wide curved arch under the high gate-tower into the courtyard. This was paved with white flags, and half a dozen janissaries lounged on guard, twirling their moustachios and leaning on their guns, scarcely giving the slaves a glance as they entered. Through another curved door they went, down a hall of white arches, and into another courtyard, larger than the other, and most beautiful.

It was almost a miniature park, for gazelles and other tame beasts browsed on the lush grass, while doves and some fiercely coloured birds fluttered from blue-tiled roof to roof, singing yet wary of the strangers. Fountains carved to look like honeycomb, and painted blue, tinkled cool water into ponds splashed with flags. Janissaries sprawled on the marble seats, hats tilted over their eyes, the long scarf behind protecting the backs of their necks from the sun, while they chewed sweetmeats or drank sickly sherbet or rose-water from long painted jars.

Their guard, the heavy shoes rattling like grape-shot on the stones, led the two slaves down a narrow shaded path gleaming with shells and coloured pebbles to a stout door grilled with iron. A janissary knocked on the crescent knocker and a fat negro pressed his nose on the grille and chattered in Turkish. The guard answered briefly, shrugging, and the negro sniffed, lowering the lids disdainfully over his bloodshot eyes. Then bolts were heard withdrawn, a key rasped in the lock, and the door swung open on to yet another blue-painted hall.

"Sons of red mongrels," said the negro in the lingua franca. widening his flat nostrils at Francis and Finch entering in their filthy rags; "they will put fleas in the cushions of the Son of the Sun. Better to throw them on to the hook and throw the hook to the dogs, than unbelievers should enter here!"

A janissary answered in Turkish and grinned, but the negro spoke in lingua franca so that the slaves could understand. He said: "They stink, the yellow dogs! yea, they sweat ordure in the nostrils of the Prophet," and he spat in Finch's face, for Finch was grinning, trying to look pleasant.

"Thank you," said Finch, "thank you, your honour;" and he still smiled, although he breathed hard while the spit dribbled down his cheek.

"They have come to work," said the janissary who had been kind to Francis. He glared at the negro as if he wished to kick him. "It is not your task, slob of black sweat, to argue with your masters. If you ill-treat them, you answer to me. Do you understand? They are to work."

"I'd make them work," muttered the negro, cringing back. "Take them before I spew on them."

He stood aside, rattling his keys, while the janissaries pushed by and carelessly thumped him with the butts of their guns. Down the long hall they tramped and Francis was glad that he saw not the wisp of a woman's skirt, nor the curl of a narrow painted foot, for his heart was cold with terror at what fool Finch intended doing.

The bey was adding to his palace, and their task, Francis learned, was to carve some screens that bisected one unfinished room. Here he was left alone with Finch, and he heard the key turn in the lock as the janissaries marched off. The last janissary turned and looked long at him with his grey eyes—he was the lad of the galley—and Francis waited expectantly for him to speak. But he did not speak. He frowned, sucking in his lower lip, before he followed his comrades. And Francis felt exasperation tingle to his fingers. Why would not the fool talk? why this mystery? those furtive acts of tenderness? those questions in the shipyards? why, above all, that dark brooding silence?

Damn the fellow. . . . But there was Finch. He had been longing to have the fool alone. He turned to find Finch clinging to the brass grille in the door opposite.

"What the devil do you mean by bringing me here?" shouted Francis.

Finch turned, grinning. "Now, mate!" he said. "You wanted to come. It was you that set my Brain galloping. You can't blame me or my Brain. We were only doing what you asked."

Francis knew that that was the truth. He had no right to blame the zany. Himself alone was to blame; he had first talked of women. But the realisation of his own stupidity did not blunt his anger; rather, it sharpened it.

"I ask only to be left alone by you," he growled.

"You asked nothing of the sort," said Finch, turning with comical concern. "Why be angry with your mate who loves you? Ever since I came back from the coast you've been like a dog on an ant-heap, snarling at me and growling at me. If I didn't love you, lad, I'd have been angry, for what have I done to you?"

Nothing. . . . That was the trouble. Finch had actually done nothing on which Francis could concentrate his anger. He bit his lip and turned to the table on which were laid sketches, plans, tools and wood, but no dangerous weapons, no axe, no adze, only two sharp knives for cutting. But he did not want weapons. Madness to fight when freedom would be soon.

"Come," he said, "let's do what's to be done."

The room was finished but for the screen. Walls and ceiling were painted with reds and yellows in a pomegranate design and silvery beams of cedar distilled their warm fragrance. It was a very beautiful chamber while the sunlight shone outside the grilled window high in one wall.

"Come on," growled Francis; then as Finch made no move, he turned to see him still crouching at the door, seeming to listen. "What are you doing there?" he cried.

Finch waved a hand but did not turn; his face was screwed up, the eyes hooded with concentration. Then suddenly came the unmistakable click of a bolt springing back, and Francis, with sudden horror, realised what the fool had done. He had sprung the lock!

"My God," he cried, "you fool!"

"I thought you wanted a woman," said Finch, turning with his hurt hang-dog look. "I'd not have got you here if I hadn't thought it. Why, I only did it for your sake and now you're talking nasty. You're a friend, you are! I know this place. I worked here before, built this door itself, and the harem's just down there."

Francis could but gape at him, for his words were too frightening to believe. The madman really intended to huggle with the bey's wives—or rather, to try to huggle with them! Francis shut his eyes, for he was giddy as if he heard already the squeals and shrieks of those imprisoned women at sight of strange men. Locked in by the dozens, lounging days and nights away on cushions, or chirruping excitedly on those occasions when they were herded into rows while the bey strolled through their ranks, tossing his kerchief on the shoulders of her whom he chose to couch that night, these women would be like caged birds at the smell of a cat. Their shrieking would bring an army running. . . . Finch and he would be shot out of cannon when they were caught, flung to die on hooks, impaled on sharpened rods between the legs, flayed while living, lashed or, at the very least, have the soles of their feet bastinadoed with a bull's sinew for days and days. . . . Madness; yes, madness! He had always believed Finch to be a fool but had never before realised that he was a lunatic.

"Stop that!" he cried. "Leave that damned door alone or I'll yell for the janissaries. I'll roar like a bull if you don't stop!"

"And I thought you wanted a woman!" said Finch, shrugging. "Well, well! you made a zany out of me, Frankie boy." He slouched from the door. "I was only trying to help," he said.

"The only help I want," snarled Francis, turning impatiently to the screen, "is to get out of here."

"That all? . . ." said Finch. "You snivelling lying bastard!"

"What!"

"Stand over there! get over there, afore I cut your sparrow's liver out!"

Francis caught his breath as he saw that both knives were gone from the table. Finch had one between his teeth, and the other in his right hand, point up for jabbing.

"That settles you, bandy-soul," said Finch, "you poor spunkless rat. Thought you'd have a jape with little Finchy, didn't you? Yea, thought you were mighty cunning crawling around licking

whoreson Fox's behind. I saw you. Scum! Goody ickle boy, lovee good Foxey. You make me spew, you louse. Yea, you thought me a simple; a lot of simples have thought that, and mayhap I am, but my Brain is not so God-damned simple. It told me. It said: Finchy, watch out, that cuckoo's going to do the traitor on you, it said."

"I'm no traitor. . . ."

"No, just a crawling little lying cowardly bastard."

"I'm not. . . . I'm not afraid. . . . But, I . . . I . . ." He could not tell of Fox and his plans. This mooncalf would yap of it to all comers and the Turk would be certain to hear. Yet without confessing the truth, how calm the rogue? "Tom," he said, "you're right, I am a coward. I kept from you because I was afraid. I've heard tales of tricks with bowstrings and of how these Turks are right cunning with hooks and scimitars and sealing-wax. If we go near the harem, Christ have mercy on us, for the Turks'll have none!"

Finch grinned. "Oddsbody!" cried he, the words rasping from behind the knife in his teeth, "so my little chuff sings sweetly now that I've got a skewer in my paw and another in my gob! I loved you, fool, and now you'd play on that soft string to make me forget you are a traitor. Heigh ho! and your game'd mayhap win, too, if it weren't for my Brain. It's rapping like a woodpecker now, saying you're a liar, liar, liar, a roaring ranting colossal liar. And I daren't cross my Brain, you know. So what am I to do with you, eh?"

He looked down at the knife in his hand and pushed it upwards speculatively, closing one eye, as if seeing from which angle it would be best to stab, and he sighed.

"'Tis difficult," he said, and his lips played on the knife betwixt his teeth as though it were a flute, "'cause you've got me interested in harems and harem-fruit, my Frankie; you've got my Brain going on it. I've worked in and out of many a Turkish house but never afore have I worked in a harem, and I've a mind to know what goes on there of a daytime. What do the naughty packs do all day when they've no men to tickle them or to screech at? Mighty strange life that must be for the poor jades, and mighty wearisome, too, a-longing for cuckoos like us to bounce through a window. Marry! we'd not be men if we left the poor lasses sighing! I'll give 'em a vision of an upstanding lecherous fellow to prove to 'em that Turks be worms beside us men, us Englishmen! It'll be a mighty task, convincing 'em, even for a Finch, be gogs, on his lonesome. You'll just have to come with me, Frankie. I'm sorry, but you'll have to."

"Tom! listen to me. . . ." As he talked, Francis tried desperately to think of something he could say to distract this cock-brained knave from his insane determination. There were no other weapons but those knives, not even a hammer, only thin wood for carving and the metal gluepot on a pan of lighted charcoal. There was

nothing he could use against those knives. And if he called for help, whose tale would be believed? Most likely Finch would accuse him of trying to break into the harem and would get him hanged. Finch was well known and knew the language better than he, and therefore he would be believed.

"We'll be nabbed at once. Even if some of the women wanted us, there'd be others who'd be jealous and who'd call the guard at sight of our beards. Once in there we'll never get out."

"I won't want to get out," said Finch; "come on."

"No. . . . Please. . . ."

"Come on," said Finch. "Get a straight pull on your liver, you coward. I'm going to death or triumph, and you're coming with me. I can't leave you here to go puking to the guard, and you know it. It was because of you my Brain schemed all this and you're not going to let my Brain down now. Lookee, caterpillar, I know this place as well as I know my own foot. I helped to build it, I worked on the plans, I know every rat-hole. And I know women, too. I'm not frightened of them, if you are. Those poor bitches are starved for a fellow like me, and, oddsbody! I'll not disappoint them. . . . You go first so I can snick you between the shoulderblades if you start playing tricks."

"Nay, let's go tomorrow, give me time to realise what I'm doing."

"Time to peach, you mean. Go on, now."

He swung the blade close and Francis made a grab at his wrist, but Finch was ready. He slashed the blade over Francis's knuckles, then leaped back, grinning.

"I warned you," he said. "Next time it won't be your knuckles, but right inside your belly. Wrap it up. We don't want to be trailed by your blood-drips. And hurry. We've wasted time enough."

Francis tore a strip from his shirt and bound the wound. It was not deep but it hurt. And he knew that Finch meant what he said. The knave would have no conscience about killing him. He could always tell some lie to explain the murder and the Turks would not bother greatly about one Christian corpse. His only hope was to pretend to obey and to wait his chance of catching the madman off his guard.

"All right," he said, "go on. I'll follow."

"I'll follow," said Finch, salaaming low. "After you, brother."

The door opened into a narrow passageway with painted walls, tiled towards the floor. It was dimly lit with low oil-lamps and had no windows. Finch apparently knew where he was, for he guided Francis with the dagger-point in his back. A second passageway ran off at right angles and down this they turned, their tattered shoes flap-flapping loudly on the tiled floor, their irons clinking.

"Take off your shoes," said Finch.

Francis slipped off his shoes. They made a weapon if he could catch Finch off his guard.

"Turkeys always take their shoes off when they go to pray, and we're going to a holy place, by gogs. Anyhow, I worship it," chuckled Finch. "Ever since I've been in Alex., I've been dreaming of this day. Cleopatra lived here once and she may have left an egg or two around. She was a naughty pack, from what I hear. . . . Shove those shoes in your belt, like I've done. You never know . . . you may take a swat at a fly and miss and hit your mate by accident. Shove them in your belt, and be yare about it."

Francis set his teeth as he pushed the shoes behind his belt. It was not going to be easy outwitting this madman, after all.

"Now, get on," said Finch, pushing him with the dagger.

The tiles were icy under his bare feet as Francis stepped gingerly on, around another corner, up some low steps, and into a carved and cushioned room. The sunlight outside the window, showing a sky of steely blue, was like physical pain to Francis as he wished to God he were quit of this perilous adventure. Every moment he expected to meet a Turk or a negro or some jealous eunuch with a scimitar, but all as yet was silent, save for their own footfalls and the soughing of wind in the trees outside. He scarcely dared to breathe, for even the sound of his own breathing was to him like thunder in this quiet room.

"Listen!" hissed Finch.

They stood silent, listening and shivering. And then Francis heard, far off, sounding but the most feeble echo, the distant voices of women. Even in his terror, his blood warmed to the sound, and he strained, holding his breath, to hear more clearly.

"Told you," said Finch. "Open that there grille there, quiet now. . . ."

In the door a square had been cut, and when Francis pushed it, it slid back noiselessly in grooves. Now were the voices suddenly loud, as if wool were plucked out of their ears, a clamour of femininity, a confused hubbub of soft and shrill voices, bird-voices, clamouring, some laughing, some screaming, some whispering, some shouting, all women's voices of the throat and not, like men, of the belly, mingling like strings and pipes in a bassless orchestra. It set his pulses jigging like music. Finch pressed beside him, still keeping the dagger-point in Francis's back, and through the grille they saw a long chamber heaped with bright cushions, the walls painted red and gold and decorated with intertwining fretwork. But it was not the beauty of the chamber that made Francis's breath stick in his throat. He had never before seen so many women together without men.

They were unveiled and mostly were dressed in thin breeches with shirts and jackets, all beautifully embroidered. Their eyelids and around their eyes were smoky with kohl, their hands and wrists were yellow with henna, and their bodies were painted with moons and stars and palm-branches and arrowheads and spots. Light

from the lattices shone goldenly into that dim room, in great transparent yellow bars quivering with motes, and glossed the women's hair and skin. There sat, quite close to him, a red-haired wench with her hair fluffed out with stickyness from dates. She was crooning to herself while she sewed. But there were women of every shade of colour in that room, from milky white to inky black, and most of them were fat or fattish, some grossly so, but others carrying flesh with goddess-like proportions. Skin gleamed through transparent silk at the slightest move: a knee showed, a thigh, an elbow, a breast. Some wore high-heeled buskins, others' feet were bare and were stained with henna, while some had bells tied about their ankles, bells even on their big toes to tinkle when they stamped in the dance, some clattered when they walked on metal shoes, like pattens, five or six inches high. Hair of every type was on their heads—straight, wavy, curling, fluffy, ringleted—and of many colours and shades—gold, brown, yellow, whitish, red, and black—and with some it was plaited with pearls or jewels, and it fell to their waists, to below their waists, to their knees, wellnigh to cover the feet of some; others wore it unbound and unribboned, while others combed and pinned it high, and some had tiny round feathered caps on their heads.

Women from many countries, all chosen for their beauty by a fastidious bey. Women from Europe, from far Russia, from India, from Persia, from Georgia, from Hungary, from Greece, from Arabia, from Italy, from Spain—from every country nigh the Mediterranean: women stolen when girls from their homes to be sold at monstrous prices, children not twelve years old sold to couch with the bey of Alexandria. Now they lounged or wandered in this huge chamber, their cage, women white as milk, as black as ebony, as brown as earth, as golden as honey . . . women of all sizes, of all shapes, all colours; and all gabbling different tongues as if they'd swallowed parrots whole.

Francis gaped, dazzled by such plenitude of beauty, at this cage of chattering human pies, kept for no purpose but for one man's occasional recreation so that they might bear him sons. He had heard tales of Mohammed who could not refuse, it was said, even the ugliest woman's pleading, and of his harem as large as Solomon's, although from all those eager wives he had never bred one son to live; but the tales had seemed to Francis mere bawdy talk, till now. So men actually did have gigantic harems! although most of the women there were only concubines—hadn't Mohammed's own favourite, A'ishah, been not a wife but a concubine?—there seemed no difference in their status. Wives and concubines were equally beautifully dressed and equally beautiful in themselves.

Francis knew not on which woman to rest his glance. He paused to stare at one and was distracted by another, then by another, by another, by another. . . . One moment a dusky Arab fascinated him by the proud manner in which she walked, head high and strong-

muscled breasts uplifted, and then the next, he swore he loved that golden Persian lolling on her back and throwing sugarmeats to a monkey, although she was tattoed with purple gazelles, moons, suns and the figures of men in silhouette and with crosses that had each arm crossed on the tip. Francis flinched to think of the pain she must have suffered thus to destroy her beauty, for he had been told how the Persians stippled these designs with sheep's gall mixed with lampblack from the wick of a sacred olive oil lamp and with fresh milk drawn from the breast of a mother of a girl-child : if she were mother of a boy, it was said, the stippling would fester, the milk would sour. But scarcely had he eyed the Persian than another girl, a yellow-tressed Georgian, startled him with her loveliness. Negresses, too, were beautiful as they walked in their thin shifts, black legs darkening in patches the cloth, while they carried sherbet and sugarmeats to petulant sultanas or scratched their wriggling backs. There was one adorable little woolly-headed black wench, he noticed, scratching the fat shoulders of a Greekish-looking woman who gurgled in ecstasy while her eyes rolled up under the lids, like a sleeping dog's, as another yawning black beauty tickled her feet with a palm-frond.

"Aren't you glad now you came with me?" whispered Finch, and Francis turned, startled to awake to reality, feeling Finch's hot breath on his cheek. For a moment, Francis's delight in that menagerie of women had driven off even fear, but now fear swooped again and caught him by the throat. If they were to be seen . . . if some eunuch or old woman were to turn that corner . . . oh! they would be sliced into a hundred little pieces!

"Let us be off," he gasped. "Here is madness!"

"But sweet madness," grinned Finch, pressing the knife-point in a little. "'Tis worth being Tom o' Bedlam to such a multitude of Maudlins! It's worth even dying after seeing such heaven, even if you plumb to hell. Yea, yea. That is sooth. He was a good prophet, that Mohammed fellow, and I don't know why I've stayed Christian when I could have had all them, just for saying a few words."

"For the loss of your soul," said Francis.

"My soul's never been much use to me," said Finch; "it's only tripped me into being a slave. Yea, and they say that when a Moslem dies he goes to a heaven just like that in there, he lies on a couch for eternity with boys and girls to bring him anything he wants and women always ready. But you've got to crawl over the edge of a sword-blade first, they tell me, and I've never had much of a head for heights. That's what's put me off being cut, I suppose. That's their heaven, all girls and boys. Not like ours, all cold marble walls and harps and angels that don't do things. But as a dirty old Ottomite once told me, they've got houris waiting that smell like musk and taste like honey. . . . Just give 'em a rap on that door, will you? I can't open it, for it's bolted inside . . ."

"Do you mean to say——?"

"I'm saying it! Rap on that door!"

Francis felt his limbs harden as if to ice as he glared into that madman's face. It was the face of the same Finch, no different from the jovial clown of the shipyards. Francis had somehow expected it to reveal its lunacy, but, no . . . this was the face of the boy he remembered in Plymouth, the young fool who would climb a steeple if you dared him, who would have fought a bull had you taunted him with cowardice. That boy had grown into this zany who yet remained a boy with all a boy's contempt for consequences.

"All right," grinned Finch, "if you won't, I suppose I'll have to. . . ."

He turned to the grille and whistled like a sailorman for wind—a screech more than a whistle, through shut teeth—and there was sudden silence in the harem. Francis's body burned as all the women with huge eyes and gaping mouths looked at the door. Then one plump little yellow-headed Georgian squealed and rolled on her back, dragging up her legs to hide her face, and displaying a huge posterior in silken breeches. Her scream awoke the others. All the women screamed, they shrieked, they howled, some running to hide, others throwing themselves on their faces as if praying, others burrowing amongst cushions, while negro slaves ran yelling for the guard.

"Good morning, ladies!" shouted Finch. "Enjoy your little selves while you're beautiful. Me and my mate Frankie Leland's waiting to be welcomed. . . ."

Even the peacocks screamed and the monkeys chattered on their chains. The matrons shook their fists and spat; then came the shrill babbling of a black eunuch as he was dragged in by a dozen women all pointing, all pointing up at the door behind which Francis stood, aghast. The eunuch gaped at the grille, then he wailed and threw his turban to the floor, and ran out, wailing.

"What'd they want to peach to him for?" growled Finch, spitting with rage. "They'll get us killed. . . . Mate, we'd best be going!"

Francis gaped at him, terror robbing him of strength and initiative. Best be going! with the women howling, birds and monkeys and pet dogs howling with them, a concatenation of enmity at sight of bearded faces peering into a lewd nunnery! No shouts of fighting men had ever weakened him as did that shouting of women. It was inhuman noise, like the shrill maledictions of witches disturbed at some secret sabbath and wailing for vengeance. If they could catch him they would, he felt, perform some diabolic rite, emasculate him with long finger-nails, revenge themselves on man's mastery in having caged them in harems. It was the shouting of women who saw their opportunity for revenge for their caging, revenge on the male who had netted them and jailed them for his selfish pleasure.

"God save us," he moaned, and sweated.

"Come on," snarled Finch, and gripped his arm, dragging him from that inhuman shrieking. He dragged him into a long passage, yet still those cries deafened Francis, sent his heart sickeningly, madly beating. He felt that he would never forget them, would never feel at peace with women again, would always hear under their gentle voices those unleashed devils crying to destroy him in maenad, almost religious frenzy.

"Who'd have thought females were such mooncalves?" gasped Finch as he ran, his face twitching with malevolent exasperation; "the silly bitches. . . . Here . . . you might need this. . . ."

Ahead, Francis heard the crash of iron-soled shoes, and gratefully he seized the knife Finch gave him. Janissaries were running to intercept them, running before and behind them, and that terror drove even the echoing shrieks of women from his ears.

"I'll kill you," he sobbed, "when I get you, Finch!"

When he got him, if he got him. . . .

Into a side-passage Finch ducked. Francis followed. Slippered feet sounded nearby, the clank of steel, the rattle of a sword against a wall, the baying of angry hunters. Finch was scrabbling with all fingers at a carving of roses, muttering, cursing and praying while he sobbed in impatient agony.

"It's here," he muttered, "here . . . I know . . . God curse my liver, I know . . . here, somewhere. . . ."

Were those dogs howling or was that noise the shouting of men? not of ordinary men, not of men even in the midst of battle, but of men who lusted for justice on those who had soiled a holy place, the shouting of Mohammed's troops who saw human ordure in the sacred Caaba. It was not merely justice that they shouted for, it was not only to kill escaping slaves, but to sacrifice infidels who had smeared with their glances a holy of holies, violating the virginal faces of women unveiled.

"For God's sake," Francis moaned, "hurry, hurry. . . ."

Finch tugged on a little carved rosebud and Francis stiffened to see a door slide slowly, maddeningly slowly, open on blackness.

They fought to get in first until the door widened and both tumbled in, then Finch pulled on a lever and the door slid back, cutting away the light, until all was black and they could no longer see each other's white faces.

"Glory to God," sobbed Finch, "I thought we'd never do it . . . Hisst!"

No need to hiss for silence. Francis held his breath and his eyeballs hurt in the lids as he strained all his senses, it seemed, into his ears, and he could hear his own and Finch's breathing as loud as the hissing of kettles. But other sounds grew louder, the piercing wail of a eunuch, the deep angry voices of men, the clash of iron shoes, the pad of slippers, the grinding of a matchlock-butt into the floor. The devils had stopped outside, evidently arguing their campaign,

the two opposing groups having met and yet not caught the infidels between them.

Eternities, Francis felt, were in the beat of his pulse roaring under his ears, his heart was clamouring like a gong, calling on him to act, like an imprisoned slave begging its jailer to save it from death. But he could do nothing, he dared not even breathe and shuddered at the thought that he or Finch might cough or sneeze and thus betray their hiding-place.

Apparently their pursuers had come to some decision for they hurried away and he was about to let the breath gasp out of him when he heard voices again. Two men remained, it seemed, one a eunuch with a boy's pipe, the other a man with deep-bellied voice. In strange contrast, their voices mingled, drum and flute quarrelling, trilling high, sinking to heavy notes like the wind in a cavern. Bird and animal, parrot and lion, they sang their duet to the thunder of his heart. Bird was growing angry, voice squeaking, animal was calm but there was menace in the timbre. High and low, soprano and bass, voices mingled, but soprano won, soprano was always highest, a boatswain's pipe above thunder, it never ceased while the animal-growling kept on as if half-abashed, inarticulate against the noisy bird-torrent. Yet though the bird won the duet, it left the field before the beast. Francis heard it retreating, yet trilling, trilling into distance until a door slammed on it. Animal was left. He heard it hawk and spit, heard a gun screwed into the floor, then dragged along the floor. Animal, too, was going, animal had rounded the corner, the metal soles' thud-thud, grew dim, dimmer, and was silent.

Francis sagged as he leaned against the wall, and his hand so trembled that almost it dropped the knife.

"God be praised," he whispered.

"Yea," whispered Finch, "I think they've gone. A near thing that, be gogs!"

Yea, they had gone. No one at that moment walked outside, there were no longer voices arguing, all was silent, and with new hope, blood ceasing its race under his skin, Francis grew calmer as he peered about him in the dark. This was but a small chamber containing, so far as he could make out, naught but a couch and cushions and a wooden chest on which he sank, letting his muscles relax.

"Peculiar place, isn't it?" said Finch. Already his voice had taken on its old sprightliness. He was not a man with a man's fears, he was an animal in his swift-passing moods that could be distracted even from terror by any chance thought. His voice was light again as if he had not just narrowly escaped a terrible death and he talked with the old easy self-confidence as if there were nothing to fear in this world or the next. "A hiding-place, this is," he said, "built special for the bey. The fellow that made this was strangled with a bowstring in case he talked of it. But he told me his plans while he was working on it, for these Turks are so stupid, they never thought

he had to plot everything. They just thought he came here and made it and it never occurred to them, thank God, that he might have plotted details with a mate. Yea, he told me all about it, that rose-bud you've got to push to open it and this lever here. A merry rogue he was; I warrant you he could sing a song the dead would trip to on the gallows. Came from Italy, place called Ravenna. . . ."

"I ought to kill you," said Francis.

"Eh? want to kill me, do you? and me giving you a knife. That's what I call gratitude, I do!"

"Gratitude! to lead me here!" Francis's rage trembled to his toes, his eyes were hot as he peered through the darkness, wondering where best to plunge his knife into that shadow. Up into the belly . . . useless to seek the heart between the armour of ribs. Yea, into the belly.

"Whose idea was it?" snarled Finch. "Answer me that, you ungrateful toad! Who wanted women, eh?"

Francis stood slowly to his feet, knife in his fist. He did not hear Finch's protest, his thoughts all being concentrated on where best to stab.

"I've got a knife, too," said Finch, edging away. "I'm not afeared of you, and don't you think it. If it's fighting you want . . . take that!"

He leapt, but Francis was waiting and swung his arm aside. It was difficult to get to grips in the dark and when Finch fell, he dragged Francis with him, and they lay like lovers on the floor, breathing heavily in each other's faces, each gripping the other's wrist and squirming to break free. Just in time Francis swung up his leg to stop Finch's knee from jabbing into his groin, but neither could use his knife, each knife being held away by the other almost at arm's length, and they made a kind of St. Andrew's cross, wriggling, gasping, yet not really moving, being equally matched.

They did not speak, not wishing to waste their strength in words, both straining, setting their teeth and grinning, pushing on the other's wrists. Neither hand was free, they were locked together, each holding a knife and the other's wrist. And thus they lay, gasping, straining, neither daring to move lest he give his enemy a chance to break free to kill.

Naught mattered to Francis but to slay this fool. His despair at thought of Fox brought tears and recklessness. What did it matter even if he died? he was shamed before Fox as a peeper into harems, and there seemed no chance of ever getting from this palace. The bey would never pardon him; like a mad dog, he would be killed on sight; and Fox would rise with the slaves, would sail to England; but he would not be with him . . . and all because of this, this Finch!

This madman Finch squirming under him, spittle sizzling in his teeth; if he could but kill him it would be some small satisfaction,

one act of justice before death, but the rogue had a grip of iron. Who would have thought such strength was in those scrawny arms!

"You bastard," sobbed Finch suddenly, "you bastard, you bastard. . . ."

That cry was surrender. Francis knew it and smiled grimly. It was a cry of despair, of the realisation that muscles were weakening. Soon that arm would give and Francis's knife would have him.

"You bastard . . . after all I've done . . . you bastard. . . ."

It was giving, he could feel the give and summoned all his strength and pushed, and heard Finch groan as his hand jerked back and the knife tinkled to the floor. Now the rogue lay open to his killing.

But his very helplessness held Francis from giving that death-stroke. He wavered, weakened a moment, then pushed the fool aside and stood up.

"You are not worth the killing," he said, and spat.

Why kill? why make any effort when you were doomed? what satisfaction in murdering the fool when soon the janissaries would have them both and would do the task far more efficiently, with subtler tricks, than he could do it? Yea, better to kneel and make his peace with God, for these four walls would surely prove to be his coffin. He knelt and prayed and Finch knelt cautiously beside him.

In the darkness in which they had striven to kill each other, they knelt and whispered of their sins to God and prayed forgiveness and for help in their desperate extremity.

But even thoughts of God, even the dark pressure of these imprisoning walls, could not weigh on that frisky mind of Finch's. As Francis wept on his knees, tormented with the fear of impending doom, Finch was shuffling his knees and scratching himself. The rogue did not seem to realise that he must remain locked in here until they died. What else for them to do? If they wandered out into the palace, they would assuredly be taken and tortured and killed. Even if by some miracle they did scale the walls, where could they hide? what spot in Alexandria was there safe from the spears of janissaries? None. Already they would have been missed from their carpentering and search would have been made, it would be realised that they were the blasphemers of the harem. Even the bagnio would be barred to them from now. Yea, even the slave-pit was shut to the slaves. They were Ishmaels in a palace, left to starve to death, to die of thirst. . . . Fox would sail with his Israelites while his Aaron would be rotting here, food for rats in a secret chamber of the bey's. . . .

"Want a bite?" said Finch, and Francis felt something pushed into his hand. It was a piece of dried meat, and he threw it away. He could not eat, particularly that rascal's food. He was too sick to eat.

"Let's fight our way out," said Finch suddenly.

"Fight our way out? where to?"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Finch, sucking in his underlip. "But if we got to the desert, we'd be safe."

"For how long?"

"Why are you always so damned mumpish?" growled Finch. "You make me sick, you do, wanting to kill a fellow what tries to do you a good turn, and then snapping at him whenever he opens his gob and tries to be a little cheerful. Do you ever do anything but grumble? Didn't my Brain get you out of that trouble when the silly brach squealed? didn't It bring you here? Eh?"

"Yea," said Francis, "It brought me here. . . ."

"Then what are you grumbling at? How did I know those wenches'd be such momes as to squeal like they did? You'd think women starved for loving would have been glad of likely lads like us. There's no understanding the wilful ways of women. Fancy them squealing, now! It makes you think, it does. But there were some delicate younglings amongst them, by my fai'! Did you see that golden brach with the lute? I'd like to have strummed on her ribs the way she was strumming those strings. I bet they're sorry now, by gogs! I bet they're weeping there! yea, I bet they are!"

"Shut up, you fool!" said Francis. "Weeping for us! they'd tear the reins off you if you got near their claws. I've never heard such screaming and, please God, I never hear the like again!"

"They were just a little surprised. . . ."

"For God's sake," cried Francis, "shut your mouth!"

"I hope I'm never locked up again with you," grumbled Finch; "you give me the bellyache."

He stood to his feet and sat on the cushions, muttering to himself, but Francis remained on his knees, trying to pray. But it was difficult to pray with terrors pressing on him, with the shuffling near by of Finch and with those awful moments when people passed outside. Even Finch then would stop fidgeting, holding his breath to listen, wondering if they would hear fingers on the carving fumbling for the rosebud that opened the panel. But no, the steps passed on, or someone would stop to talk. Apparently the secret was a secret, a private bolt-hole from the threat of janissaries' insurrection. No hand rapped on the wood, no fingers tapped.

Finch in his bare feet wandered up and down, pacing that narrow room of but four paces. He could just make it five by stretching his legs.

"This drives me cuckoo," he said, and groaned.

Up and down . . . one, two, three, four . . . and a bit.

"Like a grave," he said, "without the worms. And no one to weep over us. By God, I'll not be buried alive. It's not Christian!"

He stood, shaking with sudden realisation of his peril. It would break in on his Brain now and then that for once It might be cornered,

that for once It was in a trap that even It could not wriggle through, and at such times he wailed so that Francis had to clap his hand over the fool's mouth. But only now and then did such fears sting him to sanity. On the whole he was more than optimistic, was quite assured, in fact, of escaping somehow, and then he fretted at his captivity like a boy kept in at school who hears his playfellows calling from the street.

"I'm getting out of this," he said, "be gogs, I'm not standing for this, I'm not a bird to be clipped or a dog to be chained. I'm getting out of it."

"Get out," said Francis, "and get killed."

"We get killed either way, don't we? and I'd rather die with my enemy in my eyes than to suffocate here. I'm English and I die fighting."

"You won't have a chance to fight," said Francis.

"God deliver me!" cried Finch, "if ever there was a miserable mome in this blasted earth, it's you! Don't you feel these walls pressing on you, don't you feel you'll choke if you don't see light again? Aren't you human?"

"Too damned human."

"Then up, lad, and get out of here."

"To where?"

"You make me sick," said Finch.

Up and down, down and up, up and down . . . four paces up, four paces down, four and a bit with a stretch . . . up and down. . . .

"Sit down," said Francis, "you're driving me mad."

"You've driven me mad," said Finch.

Up and down, down and up, and down . . . four paces up, four paces down, four and a bit with a stretch. . . .

"I've walked a hundred miles," he said, "by now. If I was outside and the sea was land I'd have walked to England by now. Yea, be gogs. England and back by now. . . . One, two, three, four . . . and a bit. . . . One, two, three, four . . . and a bit, half a stride. . . . What's that in inches? Make a lot that would, fill a page of sums, and a bit. . . . God strike me with a thunderbolt, I'm wood, I'm Tom o' Bedlam without a moon. . . . I'm the screech-owl's morrow. . . . Remember a beggar singing that song, but the words escape me. I'm the screech-owl's morrow. . . . Yea, the moon's my constant mistress, the lovely owl my morrow. . . . Something like that. Never could remember songs, no matter how many rimes they had. Fancy having a lovely owl for a morrow, kissing that beak and playing fingers with those claws. . . . Fellow must have been mad that wrote that. Give me a girl any time."

He stopped and hit his fists together, and moaned.

"All those women," he cried, "all of them, all damned, all heathen. . . . It's not fair heathens having all the women! I bet they're sorry now that they squealed being all lonely with only women

to talk to. I bet they're spitting at that stupid brach that squealed. Marry! I'd not be in her breeches when those other wenches get their claws into her. . . . You know, if we stole back now . . ."

"Stole back!"

"Yes, you mome. It'd be all different now. They'd not be frightened like they were at first. We did startle them, you know. We came on them a bit sudden-like. But they'd be expecting us now and all cursing for having been such fools. Mayhap they've got a rere-supper all laid out with sugarmeats and sauces and oysters and sherbet and roast veal, all ready for us, yea, they're mayhap tossing which'll love us first. By gogs, I bet they are!"

Francis gaped in the dark at his black dancing body. Tossing which would love them first! . . . more likely sharpening their nails and teeth for a murder! Had the fool already forgotten that screaming of rage and panic, many voices merging into one feminine howl such as a goddess might give, wordless and terrible? Francis shivered at the memory. Yet this madman was already with his own preposterous arguments convincing himself that those female fiends were moaning for him! Argument was useless. Francis could but gape at him.

"Are you coming with me, fellow?" asked Finch.

"You don't really mean to go back there, to those women?"

"Yea," said Finch. "Wish I had a glass so I could spit on my hair and get it straight, that's if I had a comb. Course I'm going back. Finch's never been a blade to turn his back on a woman, no, be gogs! he just reverses that, he does, does Tommy Finch the gallant love-a-bed! Are you coming with me?"

"Good God," groaned Francis, "no!"

"I thought you were a lad of spirit, a cock-o'-whooping roisterer, a bold pricking blade, but you've got no more blood in you than a crab." Finch spat and hitched his shoulders. "When you think," he said, "of all those fat chuffs just waiting for a man! . . . and that's me! Tut, fellow! you turn my belly sour. . . . Come! be a good comrade to Finchy. . . ."

"No," said Francis. "I don't want to die with that screeching in my ear."

"They'll not screech again, I warrant you; they'll be cooing and giggling. You just see."

"I won't," said Francis. "I am staying here."

Finch fidgeted, hissing the breath between his teeth, then suddenly he said in a low sad voice, "You're not angry with your comrade, are you, Frankie?"

"Angry!" Francis took a deep breath and smiled grimly. . . . Anger was certainly not the label for his feelings! Hatred, disgust, but not just anger. . . . He could find no fitting word.

"I did it for you, you know," muttered Finch coaxingly. "Come, Frankie, give me your hand, like a Christian, and say you are not angry."

"Take it," said Francis, putting out his hand, and he grimaced when Finch gripped it lovingly. The fellow's touch seemed to send a ripple of anger down his muscles.

Finch danced away, chirruping, as if to an assignation with some loving wench.

"Fare thee well," said he. "I'll be back later for you, when it's dark. I'll bring some food if I can get away, and, you never know your luck, mayhap a little she-Turk to season the meal with hot spices . . . eh, Frankie?"

"Yea, yea," said Francis impatiently.

"Wish me luck."

"I wish you luck . . . God damn you!"

Finch was gone at last. He pulled a lever in the wall and the door slid slowly open. For a moment, he stood silhouetted, peering up and down, then he blew a kiss to Francis and stepped into the light.

The door slid back and stopped with a faint click. Francis was alone and the darkness seemed to press upon him. His first impulse was to run after Finch and to share his dangers with him. Better even to be with a maniac than alone in his own terrors. . . . Then as he moved, he heard somebody suddenly scream, and he stood quite still, his mouth open while he listened, and his body became slimy with sweat.

There sounded only that one scream, then the stamp of iron shoes, the jabber of strange tongues, and Francis shrank into the darkness. No need to wonder who had screamed. That Brain would never prompt that lean laughing rogue again. And now Francis stood alone in this dark chamber in the palace of the bey and in that vast palace he knew not one turning from another. There seemed to him no possibility of escape. He must stay here, he groaned, till death, with only rats for company.

CHAPTER VII

DARK CHRISTIAN

DESPAIR gave way to anger and Francis kicked the walls with his naked feet; exasperation followed anger to be succeeded by a frenzy of determination. He would escape. He'd risk the most horrible of Eastern deaths rather than die here like a poisoned rat in a hole. Yea, he was an Englishmen and would fight. These Turks would learn what Englishman were like when they grew angry. He had the knife that Finch had given him and he drew it from his belt and felt its edge, good cutting edge, for it had been honed like a razor for delicate fretwork. This would sever a few Turkish throats, by

God: they'd face their devil of a Prophet without their beards. But he must wait. . . . It would be madness to venture out with the palace in a hubbub, seeking him while he lay snug in the bey's own bolt-hole. Yea, the rascal had made secret chambers so that he could hide if the janissaries wearied of him, as they often did of their masters. Now the bey's prisoner lounged on the bey's couch. Francis grinned. There was pleasure in that thought, the one pleasure that eased his terrors and made him feel, for the moment, secure.

Fears that others beside the bey might know of this chamber soon faded. People were continually passing and repassing in the hall outside, shouting to one another and clashing swords, but none sought that lock in the carved flower. He could hear them jabbering—men, women, eunuchs, Turks and negroes—but he could not understand what they said, save for a word here and there. No one disturbed him, and as time passed, the tenseness left his body and he sat on the pallet, fearful only of coughing or sneezing when someone should by ill luck be outside. What if the bey should come? Let him come. Francis had a knife and would be ready. He would kill the rogue and dress in his garments and walk to freedom with a salaaming escort. Yea, it would be good if the bald son of the Prophet should visit him. But no one visited him, save rats and mice, of which he took small heed. A sailor knows rats as fellow-seafarers too intimately to trouble about them. But he was hungry and now did he regret having refused Finch's piece of hard jerked meat.

Later, if his hunger grew too unbearable, he might stamp on some of the rats and drink their blood. Thought of chewing their raw furry bodies made him shudder, but their blood should give strength. But he was not yet brought to such desperation. Too long had he been a slave for the luxuries of food and wines to mean much to his belly. Greater hunger was the lust for freedom, for fresh air, for the sound of a Christian tongue.

Yet he dared not venture out yet. Neatly though the secret door fitted into the wall, a feeble ray of light nevertheless came from the bottom, and he knew that it was still day. Many hours were yet to go before darkness, and he wondered how he would use those hours, for he dreaded to think. The moment he loosened grip of his senses, stopped listening, stopped watching the faint light, his treacherous mind slipped images of women in the dark. For so long had he smothered desire that he had thought himself safe in spiritual armour, but even the Desert Fathers had never been safe. That Spaniard had warned him. He had told him of one hermit alone on Egyptian sands who had been visited by a whore who had wished to steal his soul from God through sin of the flesh, and she had slept all night in his cell: just they two together in his desert-cave. And for very shame of her own shamelessness the harlot had died in her sleep while in the morning the monk had had no fingers left on his hands. They had been burned to stumps, for he had said to himself, "The

ways of the enemy are darkness, but the Son of God is light," and while the woman had slept, he had held his fingers over the lamp and in that pain had forgotten his lust.

Francis had no lamp and, even if he had had one, he doubted his strength in carrying through so painful a cure. He was helpless, his senses open to the fiends, and he groaned when he remembered the women of the harem. Strive as he did to forget, Satan was ever waiting to torture him with fleshy dreams. He felt that he had in him all the lusts of Mohammed of whom old Turks told marvellous legends, saying that God in His goodness had given him the seed of twenty men. "Three things are most beautiful on earth," the Prophet had said: "delicate scent, women and, above all, prayer." Francis was reduced to prayer alone and found small consolation in it.

Only two thoughts could drive out lechery and they were even more painful than lechery: thought of his desperate situation and of John Fox. Of his situation he refused to think, for he dared plan nothing and could just keep trust in God. Of John Fox he could not help thinking, for by now Fox must have heard of the harem invasion and that was a sin he would never forgive. Impossible to explain how it had happened. He knew Fox well enough to know how he would answer any excuses. He would say that he should have defied Finch, that he should have wrestled for the knives, and that was what Francis was saying to himself. Again and again he went over the details of that morning, re-enacting every gesture, making himself always the hero. He saw himself dive at Finch, clasp him about the loins and throw him on his back, he saw himself grip Finch's wrist, saw himself even kick the knife out of his hand. Yea, all seemed so simple when he thought of it, but it had not been so simple when faced with those knives. Finch had had a madman's cunning. Francis would have had no chance against him. Yet, his mind nagged, he should have tried. Cowardice was no excuse. Better to have risked death than to have submitted to that lunatic.

"One must trust God," Fox was always saying, "for God is our God and not our enemy's."

And once when Francis had cried in rage against his lot, Fox had solemnly rebuked him, saying: "If it be God's pleasure to deliver you into the hands of your enemies, it is not for you to show one displeasant look, but to take all patiently and not prescribe a fixed day for deliverance, as did the citizens of Bethulia, but to put yourself under God's mercy. And forget not," he had said, "if it be God's mind and good will to show His mighty power through you or me, even though our enemies be ten times as many they will not withstand us. Remember, lad, the old and ancient worthiness of our countrymen. In the hardest extremities they have always prevailed and left as conquerors, yea, even when it has seemed most impossible. Such has been the valiantness of our countrymen and such has been the mighty power of God."

But, groaned Francis, he could not summon such faith in this desperate extremity. It seemed that God had forsaken him. But would John Fox have thought that? Nay! Fox would have argued that if God had forsaken him it was because he had forsaken God. And had not Francis forsaken God? had he not let Satan trap him to weakness with memories of the plumb forbidden fruit of the harem?

Francis went on his knees and clasped his hands and prayed, and he wept while he prayed for strength of heart and limbs. And the prayer brought courage, faith, and he did not cease praying lest the devil take him. All through the day he knelt with his stomach sinking to his backbone, praying, praying, praying desperately.

The light had faded from under the hidden door. There was no sound anywhere near. It must be night, so Francis took the knife in his hand and, holding his breath, gently pulled the lever that Finch had pulled. Slowly the door ran back on its oiled grooves and he stepped into the hall. It was dark but his eyes had grown used to darkness and on tiptoe he walked and slid around a corner. And then he stood very still, clinging to the wall, for in the moonlight from the window, he saw a man stand leaning on a musket.

He was a janissary. Although black as any negro against the light, Francis knew him by the tall plume and the tips of his moustachios pointing each side of his shadowed face, for he was staring straight ahead, straight at Francis. Neither moved, and for a desperate moment of hope, Francis thought he had not been seen, and he was about to steal back when the janissary spoke in the lingua franca.

"I have been waiting," he said. "We slew your friend near here and I thought you must be close. We searched the palace, everywhere, but you we could not find. They thought you a jinn but I, I have no faith in jinns. I knew you were hiding near where your friend must have been hidden. So I waited here and, lo! I was wise."

Francis caught his breath for he knew that voice. This was the janissary who had given him food in the galley and who had spoken in the shipyards. Likely enough he was a friend . . . why otherwise had he sought him out? why otherwise take the trouble to plot where he must be hiding and then to wait patiently for him to come? Surely not for the mere pleasure of killing him?

"I should kill you," said the janissary. "You have profaned the palace of the bey. By my oath to the Prophet I should kill you, but I do not love the Prophet. I, too, love Christ, and you are Francis Leland."

"I am Francis Leland," said Francis, "but what is Francis Leland to you?"

"Not only does the bey command me to kill you, but my heart also tells me to lift this gun to shoot you. But the Lord the Christ

says that one shall not kill, and the Lord the Christ has weakened me, for you are my brother in God. One must love one's enemies and one must know suffering before one can see the face of God; and what suffering is greater than to succour him you hate? This should give me a thousand years' remission in purgatory. Suffering is good for the soul and the God knows how I suffer!"

"Why do you hate me?" whispered Francis. "What have I done that you should hate me and yet succour me?"

"It would not be murder if I left you here for others to slay. The blood would not then be on my sword. Nay, but it would be on my soul and God judges by the cleanliness of one's soul, not of steel. Therefore I cannot kill you, though I hate you."

"But why? why hate me?"

The janissary had been talking quietly, head down, as if to himself; he lifted his head now and looked on Francis in the dark.

"Come with me," he whispered. "Come before I weaken and slay you."

He turned on his iron heel and strode down the hall. Francis stood irresolute between two fears, but fear of the bey was greater than fear of this strange janissary, who, most inexplicably, said that he hated him even while befriending him.

Hesitantly, on tiptoe, Francis followed.

Along the dark hall they went, Francis keeping to the wall, fumbling it lest he lost all sense of direction, for the janissary had vanished in the dark. Only the thud of his iron shoes and the occasional gleam of his pale hat told Francis that he was not alone. Into the darkness he went and instinctively placed his hands across his face to protect it, as if the night were as solid as it seemed.

Then suddenly they were in moonlight. They turned a corner and saw arched windows open above a courtyard. He saw the top fronds of palms and heard their sleepy rustling and he took deep gulps of the scented air, feeling it cool on his cheeks and forehead. The janissary held up one hand and Francis hugged the shadows while the man strode a few paces, then looked sharply to left, to right. After a moment's pause, he beckoned Francis to follow and, trembling, knife in his fist, Francis followed on tiptoe. Down winding stairs they went, lit by a smoky oil-lamp in a bracket, until at the bottom, Francis saw a turbaned Turk lounging against a pillar. And the Turk held a scimitar in his hand.

At sound of the janissary's step, the Turk glared up, then reluctantly lowered his sword when he saw the blue uniform, the tall hat and moustachioed face. Francis pressed himself into a shadowed corner and held his breath as the janissary kept on, then paused before the Turk. They spoke in Turkish which Francis could not understand. He dared not move and listened fearfully to his own heartbeats that were like thunder in his ears. The Turk laughed like a

horse whinnying, and Francis saw his polished teeth flash in the light of the lamp. The janissary was laughing, too, as if there were no need to hurry, and Francis shut his eyes because he could not bear to watch. His heart like a huge clock in his chest thumped the passing seconds, and his mouth was dry, although his body sweated.

Then he heard iron-shod shoes clash on the stairs above.

A man was whistling as he strolled down, and Francis waited in panic, while both janissary and Turk looked up. He gripped his knife and waited in the deafening thunder of his own heartbeats, but the steps turned, passing down another passageway, and Francis's relief was such that almost he swooned. The sweat dripped from him and made his fingers so greasy that they could scarcely hold the knife. He was not aware of time passing and shook himself, surprised, when he heard the janissary call:

"Come. Where are you?"

He looked down and saw that the Turk had gone and that the janissary was alone under the lamp. Staggering a little, Francis crept down, hurried from under the lamp, and eagerly entered darkness again, the janissary's firm steps echoing ahead.

Then the steps ceased. Francis heard the click of a key turning and a door opened. He slid through after the janissary and stood, panting, in a little room lit only by frail moonlight from a tiny window high in one wall. He heard the scrape of flint on steel, saw the flutter of sparks growing on a piece of rag as the janissary blew on them, his face lit redly up from the naked chin. Then he lit a lamp and gradually the flame took strength, spitting and snarling, until the shadows were flung down the walls and flooded up to the edge of the ceiling.

Then he realised how exhausted he was and dropped on to the low bed as if the bones had given way in his legs. The janissary stood, playing with the wick in the bronze lamp, plucking off the dead black with his fingers in the flame. Francis watched with but faint curiosity, for his weariness had conquered fear, and he did not greatly care what happened now, the painful tension of that walk through the dark being over.

Idly, he glanced about him. The room was like a monk's, containing only a low wooden table, cushions and the bed—mere planks covered with a rug—on which he sat. In one corner rested the six-foot pole with its silver tip that janissaries carried as symbol of their authority and with which they beat or killed any who opposed them.

"Why did you bring me here?" asked Francis.

The janissary took off his hat, showing his shaven poll ringed with a red line where the brim had pressed; he put his musket beside the pole in the corner and, unbuckling his belt, laid it with the curved sword in its sheath upon the table. His eyes were heavy-lidded as if weary when he looked on Francis. He seemed very young, almost a boy, but Francis had seen sufficient Turks to know you could

not judge their ages by their faces. Despite the sun, many of them did not seem to wrinkle as much as Europeans.

"There is an Arab tale," said the janissary, "of a famed poet, one named 'Antarah, the son of a negress. When men jeered at him because he was half black, he would say: 'My soul is like your white skin, but my skin is like your souls.'"

"I do not understand," said Francis.

The janissary took no heed of his words. His heavy-lidded eyes did not move from Francis's as he continued: "His name was 'Antarah al-Haki, 'Antarah the Happy One, but 'Antarah would say that although he might smile and sing like an angel, he was not happy. He could not be happy because there was an enemy he had to kill. One enemy, the thought of whom ate at his liver like a myriad fleas. So they said to him: 'Kill this enemy that we may call you the Happy One,' for they loved his songs although they might jest at his tawny-coloured skin. So 'Antarah rode into the desert to seek this enemy who tormented him, but the enemy was cunning, and wherever 'Antarah reached, he found he had always just fled, he was always just in front of him. Day followed day but always that enemy was in front of 'Antarah and because of this, 'Antarah called him the Enemy that Runs Away. But the gods at last took pity on the warrior-poet and they showed him where this enemy lay so that 'Antarah could catch him and kill him and be called the Happy One. And when this enemy saw 'Antarah coming, he was afraid and he stood and shivered while 'Antarah brandished his spear. Then cried his enemy: 'O, 'Antarah, give me your spear!' and 'Antarah, who could never refuse anyone any request, gave him his spear. Now was it 'Antarah's turn to fly and as he went he sang a new song of how the Happiness that Flees would kill him with his own weapon. When his comrades heard of this they jeered at the black warrior with the white soul, but the women wove for him a great black cloth and on it they made in letters of gold the name of this poet of joy, and they placed this banner in the temple of Mecca where, before Mohammed, the tribes would put their different gods in the holy Caaba. For he who had known no peace while his enemy lived knew that he could not live without his enemy, and so he gave to him his spear."

"Still," said Francis, "I do not understand."

The janissary shrugged, distending his nostrils with contempt. "Because you are all English," he said. "Men of the East are poets. Yea, there is no greater honour in this land than to be named poet. That is not so in Europe, I believe?"

"Well . . . well, we like to hear poetry," muttered Francis who had never bothered about poetry save to sing a love or a fighting-ballad on suitable occasions, such as when he strummed the lute while waiting his turn at the barber's.

"All men of the desert are poets," said the janissary. "The Arabs have a saying: 'In His bounty, God gave four gifts to the

Arabs. First, the turban which is safer than a crown; secondly, the tent which is more comfortable than any palace; thirdly, the sword which gives greater protection than the highest wall; and fourthly, most precious gift of the four, He gave them the art of song.' But you of the West would not understand. There is no song in your hearts. You do not sing even when you fight. I doubt if you sing even when you are in love."

"This," said Francis, "is no answer to my question: why did you protect me? why were you kind to me aboard the galley? why did you speak to me in the shipyards?"

"Because I had heard your name," said the janissary. "I heard Fox call you by your name, then I questioned seamen and they told me that indeed you were this Francis Leland."

"And why should you trouble about Francis Leland?"

"Because Christ teaches that one must love one's enemies as one loves one's self."

"But you're a Turk."

"I am a Christian. . . . We janissaries are not Turkish born. We spit upon the Turks. We are the New Armies, the janissaries, first recruited many hundred years ago. A thousand Christian boys a year are demanded by the Sultan from his conquered countries and this New Army was first blessed by a holy man, Hajji Bektash. He blessed that army by placing his sleeve on their heads while the men knelt. That is why we wear a sleeve on our caps to this day. We are not Turks: remember that, if you would not quarrel with a janissary; and I warn you, do not quarrel with one. We are reared like priests and made to forget God in worship of Allah, but I was older than the others, I did not forget. I was but young but not so young as they thought. I had been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost and I had not forgotten."

He sighed, frowning, and stroked his moustaches, his eyes still on Francis.

"Then what are you," cried Francis, "if you are no Turk?"

"I am English," said the janissary.

"English!"

"Yea, I was born in England but only dimly remember the country. I do not know my own name, save for Michael. But whether the Turks gave me that name or whether I was baptised in it, I do not know. My father's ship with me aboard was captured when I was but a child and I was reared here, as this. I wellnigh forget both faith and tongue, but prisoners' talk brought back words now and then and recalled the sacred name of Jesus Christ. And then she came . . . she taught me of Jesus, and I remembered the truth. It was as if my soul awoke and the dove entered my heart. Yea, she brought me back to the Lamb's keeping and I shuddered for my immortal soul. And she it was who said Michael must indeed be my true name because I carried a sword."

"Who is this She?" asked Francis.

Michael slowly opened his eyes and stared at Francis. "You do not know?" he whispered. "You did not come here for her?"

"I did not come here of my own will!" cried Francis. "God forbid! I was brought here. Do you think I would come here, in the bey's palace, amongst enemies?"

"I thought . . . I was putting my own thoughts into your head, forgetting that you be no poet. You will be telling me next that you have forgotten her."

"I cannot say until I hear her name."

Very slowly, Michael said: "Bessy Fox."

"Bessy Fox!" Francis gaped at him, and his thoughts were not so much of the child Bessy, whom he could scarcely remember, but of John Fox, her father. Did Fox know that his daughter lived? He had spoken of her so rarely and so shyly . . . yea! he knew! . . . Why else was he so silent about her, so sly?

"Where is she?" cried Francis.

"Do not pretend, my friend, that you don't know."

"I do not know."

"Why then did you spy on the women? were you not seeking her?"

"I didn't know she was even alive until this moment. Fox told me she was dead."

"Yea, he has cut her from his heart. He will not even speak of her. . . . I tried to tell him once, but he'd not heed one word. He called her an apostate and said she was the whore of Babylon, and worse. He said that he would kill her if he saw her."

"But why?"

"Even now I cannot believe that you do not truly know. . . . She is one of the bey's concubines. His favourite concubine. And he would marry her, beyond doubt, if he had not his full of wives, according to the law."

Francis gaped at him, then slowly smiled. . . . So much that he had not understood was clear at last. This janissary had been kind to him for Bessy's sake, and had, at the same time, even while befriending him, hated him because he feared a rival, thinking of him as Bessy's child-lover, forgetting that younglings' lippings rarely lasted but were commonly outgrown with the years, forgotten within months, as he had almost forgotten Bessy. Only by thinking hard could he recall yellow hair, blue eyes and a puckered mouth. . . . And this fool was jealous of that memory!

He laughed. "Marry!" he cried, "I can scarcely recall the wench! Golden hair, has she not? or has it darkened with time? and blue eyes?"

"Yea," said Michael, watching him narrowly, obviously but half-convinced. "Her eyes are blue and her hair is gold."

"And for love of her you saved my life?"

"Yea," said Michael. "It was not easy for me to do, for to me she is the Mother Mary. Nay, she is Martha, for she has sinned,

although that was not her will. She is a woman, and weak. You cannot expect women to play the martyr and to die for God. We have plotted to steal a ship and to sail for England and marry there, but I am no sailor and there is no trade for me in England. Then you came. What was I to think but that you had come to take her? She has talked so much of you. She loves you still."

"Only because I was the last English lad she knew. She wouldn't recognise me now, I swear it."

"You do not love her?"

"How can I love her when I barely remember her?"

"Yea, it is a long time . . . and you were but children. Have I tormented myself for nothing? When I learned that you were here, as a slave, my first thought was to kill you. Yea, I thought to kill you. But I am a Christian and when I looked in Bessy's eyes I knew that I could not do it. How could I go to her with your blood on my hands? Nay, nay! yet she has long tormented me with your name. It is always Francis this and Francis that until I felt that I would go mad with jealousy of a wraith. And then the wraith took body and came here. What was I to think?"

"You need not have worried," said Francis. "Bessy is naught to me."

"I pray you speak the truth. . . ." Michael sighed deeply and brushed his hand over his eyes. "I have not slept for months," he whispered, "not really slept. I would doze off and you and she would come in dreams and wake me in my sweat. And I took a great oath to Christ that I would succour you. Is not the road to heaven paved with one's pains? It is through suffering, they say, that we reach God. And God! how I have suffered! I put salt in the wounds by tending you, watching that you came to no hurt. . . . And all for no cause, you say?"

"For a great cause," smiled Francis: "to save my life."

"What do I care for your life? I'd not care if you died this moment. And now that I know that you do not love Bessy, there is no further need for me to protect you. You are naught to me from now."

"Nay, nay," said Francis. "You have saved my life and you cannot cast it away. My life is yours and you dare not betray it."

"Ay," said Michael slowly, "you are right. . . . I have taken your life to myself by saving it. I cannot kill you now. . . ."

Francis laughed and trembled, he was so weak. "What a strange web are we tangled in!" he cried. "But now we know each other, mystery is no more, and I am very, very hungry, Michael."

There was little in the cell for Francis to eat, only a few dried dates, for janissaries shared all in common, like monks. After a battle, spoil was distributed irrespective of rank. Pay and expenses were given collectively and when men went sick or needed money

for some extraordinary reason, they drew from the common purse on general agreement. When there was a share-out of new equipment or booty, it was always done at night so that the stronger should not take the best and the youngest recruit stood equal with the veteran. Captured armour—for the Turks neither made armour nor ordnance, leaving such menial work to slaves—was shared indiscriminately, and one suit might be parcelled out amongst twenty men. All living was communal, even the sultan himself held but a common janissary's rank and drew the common pay, while the officers—the agha and the buluks and jema'ats—were theoretically the equal of their men, although they demanded a puppet's obedience, and discipline was hard. When a new *orta*, or company, filed past the agha for the first time, each man gripping the coat-tails of the man in front, the agha gave each a smack in the face and tweaked his ears, while the sufferers salaamed. They must learn to obey, for they were children of the agha, these fierce moustachioed devils of warriors, archers, gunners, fusiliers, camelry, guards.

While Francis chewed at the sticky dates, Michael told him of the strict rule under which he lived and he regretted, he said, to see the old asceticism dying, some janissaries actually breeding and bringing their sons into their *orta*. He talked both boastfully and humbly. Although his voice was low, like a monk's in the shadow of the monastery, his eyes gleamed when he spoke of brave deeds or of the hardness of the regimen.

"We have brought peace to the empire," he said. "Men may ride abroad without fear of robbers, because of us, for our justice is swift and terrible. Yet though we are forbidden fleshy delights, there is one delight we are permitted, one that we can worship. Food. For men of the East are great eaters and like rich spices. Our cooks are honoured in the *orta* and our commander we name the *chorbaji* or the Man of Soup. When we go to battle, we carry our stew-pot before us as Christians carry their Cross. And if we should lose our pot in battle, woe becomes us, for we are shamed for ever. And that is rightful, for a man is boneless without food. A full belly is a warrior's best weapon. If we be angry, the bey himself, yea, even the sultan, trembles when he hears us up-end our bowls of rice. When we up-end the bowls, it means that we are prepared to rebel for the sake of our rights. We can make or unmake a bey. We care not even for the sultan if he should think to gainsay our demands. We, we who once were Christians, now are rulers of all Islam Would that my fellows could remember the Faith, as I remember it. Then would Christ rule the world!"

"Cannot you teach them the gospel?"

"And be martyred? yea, for these apostates are the most fanatical of damned Mohammedans. They hate Jehovah, as if He were their living enemy. From boyhood, remember, they are trained in that hatred. I, too, suffered it; I grew to believe that Christ was merely

one of the Prophets, and that the worshippers of Him as God were children of hell. I, too, longed to build myself mansions in paradise with the blood of Christians. Yea! was I great a sinner, delighting in bowing to the east and crawling on my belly to Mecca where the demons sit. I defiled the temples of Christ, spat on the paintings of Him, broke the images of Him and His sweet Mother, for the Prophet has taught that God is One and cannot be pictured. It is sin even to try to understand God, to do aught but obey Him, and you are damned for eternity should you paint or carve God or even try to describe Him in words. 'He begets not nor is He begotten,' they say. 'He is like no creature that our eyes can see.' They must live in worship but never seek to understand, and that is why we have no priests. Each man is priest unto himself. Thus did I, too, believe until Bessy opened my eyes to the Truth."

He flushed, regretting having mentioned her, and was silent while he looked at Francis, seeking to read in his eyes what effect her name had had on him, but Francis only smiled blandly and said:

"If God be so vague a creature, without form, why do you love Mohammed, and even Christ?"

"We love them as Prophets. Why did I say we? The devil still lurks to trap me on my tongue! They worship them as Prophets and believe Christ did not die. They say that He was saved from the Cross, that a phantom was nailed in His place, and He went straight to Allah. A drop from the River of Paradise, they say, is in the bodies of all the Prophets, from Abraham to Jesus to Mohammed. And Mohammed, they say, was born circumcised and with a rim of kohl about his eyes."

"It is all blasphemy," said Francis. "Greater blasphemy than the Roman teaching. They worship their Pope as you worship a Prophet, but it is we who worship God alone, we whom they call Lutherans."

Michael flushed and sucked in his lips as if he dared not speak the words that rose in him, and there was anger in his eyes. How deep, wondered Francis, was the skin of Christianity on this Moslem? was his love for Jesus but transmuted love for Bessy? If he lost faith in Bessy, would he not lose faith in Christ also? Yea. Francis saw by the darkening of the fellow's skin that he was easily scratched and was angered by any slighting word about the Prophet. But he did not wish to argue with him yet, not until he had skipped out of this palace, so he left talking of Christ and Mohammed and asked about the janissaries again: what was their faith?

"The faith of the Prophet," said Michael, then as if he, too, shied from argument on religion, he said quickly, "We are given fourteen laws by which we must abide. First, we must obey our masters. Secondly, we must keep harmony within the *ortas*, no man must quarrel with another. Thirdly, we must shun weaknesses unsuited to brave men. Fourthly, we must follow the rules of Hajji Bektash,

in whose honour we wear the sleeve in our caps, and who said to the first janissaries: 'Let your countenance be ever bright, your hands victorious, your sword clean, and no matter whither you go, return always with calm white faces.' Fifthly, we must be recruited in the old fashion, taken as children from Christian mothers and bred to forget our mothers, although this rule is falling, I fear, into disuse. Sixthly, if we are disobedient or betray our order, we have the right to an honourable death: we must be executed at night and cannon must be fired in our honour when our bodies are thrown into the sea. Seventhly, none can punish us save our own officers. Eighthly, promotion must come by seniority. Ninthly, we shall be pensioned when we are old and can fight no longer. Tenthly, we must shave our chins to show we are not like common Turks. Eleventhly, we must be celibate: another rule, long forgotten! I doubt if there be one virgin in the *orta*, save for me, for I have never sinned in the flesh. Twelfthly, we must always sleep in our barracks and never in strange houses where we might be tempted by the smell of women. Thirteenthly, we must follow some trade apart from fighting. Fourteenthly, and lastly, we must be ready in peace time to exercise in military arts from June until November."

"They are excellent rules," said Francis, "like the papist Knights of St. John."

Michael's face was dark as, sitting on a cushion, he hugged his ankles and said broodingly, "They are the only warriors who have ever defeated us."

Yea, he said: "Us!" He was not wholly Christian and the greater part of him was Turk. Now he fell silent, hugging his ankles, glaring at the wall and frowning as if he brooded on that great defeat, a little over ten years ago, when a handful of knights on rocky Malta had broken the back of the Turk, killed uncountable janissaries and disgraced the name of that notorious pirate, Dragut, the successor to Khair-ed-Din, Barbarossa, the Red Beard. For all the might of Islam had not taken that little Christian isle. In rage had great Suleyman swung his armies into Europe, against the Emperor Maximilian, up to the walls of Szigeth, the city he hated for it had once before defied him. Again now it defied him, and the tale of that siege had brought courage to Christendom that was shrinking before the Turk who, it seemed, would shortly rule the world, Europe as well as the East. For when the men of Szigeth, after months of siege, found themselves starving with no hope of relief, they gathered together all the powder that was left and filled each gun to the muzzle; the rest of the powder they laid as a gigantic mine in the midst of the city. The knights then put on their gayest garments, wearing gold chains, and with all their rings upon their fingers. Their leader took the keys of the castle and a purse of a hundred pieces of gold for, said he merrily, the Turk that kills me shall not complain that his work was

wasted. Then they threw wide the gates, shot their guns, and let the Turks charge in while one lit the powder-train to the huge mine. Neither Christian nor Turk lived after that.

But such brave deeds do not alone win wars and Francis could see no hope for Europe. Christians were too eagerly fighting Christians ever to unite. The Turks had taken the shield of terrible Tamerlane and soon, it seemed, all Europe must succumb. All Europe, but not England . . . that island would never submit. Let Italy, Germany, France, even Spain be conquered . . . but never England, for England owned the seas and men like Hawkins and Drake would destroy these slow galleys within hours. But the rest of Europe must soon fall to these terrible warriors, and Francis shivered as he looked on the stern dark face of Michael while he brooded, seated on his cushions.

And Francis grew afraid again. The relief of reaching this harbour after passing the dangerous shoals of the palace had been sufficient to make him drunk, but now his head was clearing. He had escaped the bey but was in the hands of this young fanatic, this semi-Christian semi-Turk, and he could almost feel the man's hatred. His love for Bessy had brought chivalry but, as Francis remembered from books he had read, the most chivalrous of knights were always prepared to kill a rival. They called them dragons and chopped off their heads. And this monkish warrior, fiery with lusts that had never known relief, was the most dangerous enemy he had ever met. He must be fought subtly for he had the Turk's philosophical mind, love of involved argument, of precedents and allegories. Francis's one hope was to play always on the Christian chivalry, to ignore inconsistencies and to be very wary of his tongue.

"I would sleep," he said: "I am tired."

As if awakening, Michael looked at him in a puzzled fashion, then said: "Where can you sleep? I must get you out of this palace somehow, for once you are outside, I can forget you. I can leave others to slay you with good heart. But how?" he murmured, screwing up his eyes.

"That is for you to say," said Francis, and again Michael was silent. Then abruptly he said: "Do you swear on the Cross that you have forgotten Bessy?"

"Yea, yea," cried Francis, "I have told you so. She is naught to me."

Like a sick man who must fret the wound and stop it healing, it seemed that Michael could not keep his tongue from Bessy. This was his first opportunity to speak of her and although he knew that in silence lay wisdom, his jealousy was such that he could not be silent. He said:

"She is close by here. We are not far distant from the harem and I am privileged. Only a few walls off, the harem stands. When I lie here of nights I keep my sword beside me, feeling that I am indeed

Michael, Michael who guarded Eden with a flaming sword. But there is one devil I cannot keep away from that Garden. When the bey chooses, he can enter. No other man can go, only those half-men, the eunuchs, and if even by accident a whole man looked on those women's faces, they would chop off his head, as they would have chopped off yours had they caught you. They would not question why he was there, they would not ask his rank. They would kill him as they killed your friend. They would chop off his head, chop him in pieces, for having dared to see skin that only the bey should see."

"Then how did you meet Bessy?" asked Francis.

"Ah!" said Michael and smiled—he looked a boy when he smiled—"I am privileged. Let me tell you her story. When she was taken, she was a child, as you know, and she was put up for sale. Weeping, unveiled, naked, she stood, while greasy men pinched her skin, felt her teeth to see if they were strong. . . ." His eyes glittered and his breath came fast. "And she was bought for the bey," he said, "for the Turks like women very young. Was not Mohammed's favourite wife, A'ishah, but nine years old and he fifty when he bought her for twelve ounces of gold? And he loved her beyond all the others, even though she carried her childish toys to the bridal couch? Yea, he forgave her for playing with little babies of wood and cloth, although Allah himself has forbidden the making of likenesses. But for love of this little child, even Mohammed sinned. He let her keep her toys. She was very beautiful, it is said, and, like a child, loved finery. She would anoint her hair until the ointment melted greasily over her face. Of such an age, too, was Bessy when the bey bought her.

"I will say this!" cried Michael, leaping suddenly to his feet and striding the floor, "the bey was gentle with her, for she was a Christian and knew naught of love. He was kind—she told me so herself—he had the old women in to teach her love. And she is still his favourite, although now grown into a woman. And how did I, you ask, I, a young and sinful man, see face to face one of the treasures of the harem? I will tell you. Child though she was, she would not wear her veil and she could not understand why she should be kept only with women and with men with the voices of women. So she crawled one day through a window and ran about the palace. When the Turks saw her, in terror they fell on their faces and none would dare to stop her. None but women or eunuchs could look on that face which belonged to the bey.

"I was on guard and she came to me before I knew of it. She stood before me and I sweated and knew not what to do. So I took the sleeve from my cap and bound it about my eyes and thus, feeling my way by the wall, I led her back to the harem. And for that, to this day, am I called Michael the Blind."

Francis held his breath, startled by the passion in the man's voice, by the sudden gentle smiles and the sudden gay flash of his

eyes. He was living again that day of meeting Bessy, and his body trembled with the memory.

"I was taken and put in prison. There was talk of blowing me out of a cannon, but my agha pleaded for me before the bey. He showed how faithful I was, covering my eyes that I might not look on the forbidden face; faithful also in my duties, seeing that the treasure of the harem should not fall into wicked hands. And the bey forgave me and I thought no more of it, save that I liked to think of that sweet face I had seen for a moment, until one day my agha called for me. He had with him great men of the court and I thought I was to be slain, but no! they told me that I was to see the little English concubine.

"I thought at first it was a trap for never had such a thing been known amongst the Turks. For a janissary to see the face of a woman! I had seen no woman's face in all my life save those of children, for no woman from ten to a hundred walks unveiled in Islam. Yet here was I ordered to play with the English child. Later, I learned what had happened, for Bessy told me. She had never ceased weeping, she said, since that day when she saw me, and she told the bey she would never live happily amongst women. She begged him to let her have me for her servant, telling him tales of English women's ways. At first, he thought to kill me, being jealous, but then by her prattle, he knew that this was but heathen custom and, so great was his love, he submitted to it. Therefore am I allowed to meet her. But never alone. Always there are eunuchs and old women to watch and to see that I do not so much as touch her hand while we read together, and she must be veiled, so that I see naught but her eyes, except when slyly she lifts the veil to pout at me, when the eunuchs are not watching. I have been her tutor and she mine. She has taught me the English tongue, and it came back to me, so that in English we can talk while our guardians cannot understand. That was how she led me back to Christ."

"I have read of such a love," said Francis, "in some old book. How lovers loved with eyes alone."

"She does not love me! We do not love!" Michael turned with fury on Francis. He shouted: "How could she love me? I am but a slave to her, a playmate, even though now she be a woman. I am her dog to worship her and yet I dare not even lick her hand, therefore am I not her dog. I am a post to be talked at in English words. Who knows that better than I? How many times alone in this accursed room have I not repeated to myself the words she used, sucking them over as if they were sugarmeats? She is kind, she is gentle and beautiful, she does not lose her temper at my ignorance. She does not have me whipped when I am foolish. Yea! gladly would I suffer at her command! What matter the whip if I were whipped for her! Gleefully would I suffer like Christ on the Cross if she would but pity me! And it is always you she talks of, you!

you, Frank Leland! Frankie, Frankie, Frankie! you. . . . O, how can I look on you and yet keep my sword sheathed?"

Francis tried not to shrink before that rage, but he had only a knife while this man had a sword and a gun and a spear. Michael was strong, well nourished, while Francis was weak from slavery and ill-feeding. Yet he tensed his muscles, ready to fight if needs be but suddenly, Michael turned away and sank on the cushions and stared at the stone floor.

"This is my cross," he whispered. "If heaven be the price of suffering, by God, I have purchased of heaven!"

He said no more but gazed unblinkingly at his own hands in his lap. Now and then, he sighed deeply or groaned, but he did not speak to Francis, and Francis gradually relaxed. He dared scarcely breathe lest he stir a demon in the man, for Michael's moods were so swift that there was no preparing for them. His voice changed in a second from rage to tenderness, from despair to joy. He was neither of East nor of West and like one damned was lost in either world. Christian and Moslem had not mixed, they took his soul for battle-ground, and the poor wretch lived in torment. That was plain. But Francis was too worried about his own immediate future to pity Michael. He could not hide for ever in this cell, even should Michael desire it, and the Turks would kill him on sight, as they had killed Finch. Even if he did escape out of the palace—and that did not seem likely—whither was he to go? There was no house in Alexandria that would accept him while even the bagnio seemed to him now desirable, like home.

He would have to take to the desert and live like some old Christian Father. But the problem was so great, so hopeless, that he could not think of it. He was tired, and his chin dropped on his chest and, suddenly, he slept. Still, Michael did not move. He sat cross-legged, glaring down, and only when Francis snored, did he glance suddenly up and stare at him. Impatiently, he twisted, frowning, and looked long at the sword on the table and then at Francis, and sighed, as if not knowing what best to do.

CHAPTER VIII

JEWEL OF THE HAREM

ALL through the night, Michael scarcely stirred, save to take long drinks of rose-water, for he sweated in his anguish. Yet his face showed little of the torment within. This was his Passion, he told himself: like the Lord Jesus in the Garden before His martyrdom, he prayed and he felt that his sweat, like the sweat of Jesus in that terrible hour, was drops of blood oozing from his skin. This was

his Gethsemane, and to kill this fool on the couch would be to deny God for love of a woman. He would be murdering God in the flesh of a Christian because of evil desire. Nay, nay! his desire for Bessy was not evil. He was aware of no carnal thoughts, he did not wish even to kiss her, all he wanted was but to worship her. "Before the cock crows," said Christ to Peter, "you shall thrice deny that you know Me." He had this night in which to battle, and before the cock crowed, he swore he would have decided whether to prostrate himself to God or to deny Him thrice, to deny Him by slaying or surrendering to death a Christian and by lying to Bessy. Those were his three alternatives, and each was denial of Christ. By giving this man to the bey, would his own hands be free of blood? And if he lied to Bessy, not telling her that Francis was safe, would not his silence be a lie, a millstone on his soul? God, he prayed, what was he to do? Please God, vouchsafe a sign.!

The oil lamp sputtered and he looked up to see if that sputter was intended for a sign, but if it were, it was one he could not interpret. And what was great agony to him was the realisation that all was his own doing. Why had he waited for Francis? why had he troubled to discover where his hiding-place must be, close by the corpse of his friend? why had he not gone about his duties and let another find and kill him? There was some devil in his heart that always drove him to self-torment. Nay, nay, it was the grace of God in him that had commanded him to wait in the darkness to aid a Christian in distress. Had not God prompted him to wait, sending the others off helter-skelter and leaving him cool-headed, able to realise that as the one had walked in that hall, apparently coming from neither end, there must be a secret chamber near? All God's doing, surely? . . . Yet must he lose the one thing he held precious, his intimacy with Bessy? was this the final burden God would put upon him, the ultimate testing of his soul?

She loved this man. She loved his memory, she talked of little else, and she was arrogant and wilful. Should she learn that Francis was even in Alexandria, she would demand to see him. Yea, she'd have ordered the bey to unchain him and bring him to the palace. But Michael had not told her, had not dared tell her, and now God sent his enemy to him as if demanding that he speak. If she knew that Francis was in this chamber now, she would defy the eunuchs and all the palace-guard to come here. She was that kind of woman, imperious yet gentle, unable to accept man's bridling of her. He had to thank his own unique position to that will of hers that refused to recognise obstacles between herself and her desire. What other woman—and she had been but a child at the time—could have made even the humblest Turk permit his wife to speak to a man when he was not by? It was true that they were watched and that there was no possibility of their sinning, even of their hands touching, yet the very smell of a man in the harem was nigh as great a calamity to a

Turk as the actual adultery itself. Either sin would he have repaid with the bowstring or the scimitar or even, should his choler be great and his dignity as immense as a bey's, by the gauch: he would have had his victim tossed down inside a tower containing beams, four feet apart, and on each beam, flesh-hooks to tear the living body as it fell or, mayhap, to catch and hold it in its descent. Yet the great bey had bowed to his petulant concubine's whim and had let her have her janissary to read with, instead of insisting on some parchment-scholar too blind to see aught but writing. Only because she was English-bred and he did not understand any English ways beyond the lies she told him had he permitted this unprecedented freedom.

Such was the strength of English Bessy's will.

Michael groaned to think of it. If he were to tell her of Francis hiding here, she would undoubtedly insist on seeing him and that, of course, was utterly impossible. Even if it were possible, the bare thought was sufficient to make him writhe and moan aloud. He could not tell her! Why should he tell her? why destroy his happiness for the sake of this damned fool on his pallet? Let all the cocks of Alexandria crow his soul to hell, he would not tell her. . . . Besides, how could they meet? there were no corners for lovers'-meetings in this palace. Nay, nay, he must not think of it.

In his torment, he sweated so that he drank every few minutes until he found the jug was empty. Reluctantly, he set about refilling it, for his soul's anguish had entered his flesh and even to move had become painful. He took the jug and tied the handle to a rope, then pulling on the ring of an iron plaque in the middle of the floor, he lifted the plaque and lowered the jug.

It touched bottom but for the moment he made no attempt to haul it up. He sat, gaping at a sudden thought, then went on hands and knees and peered down through the hole. All below was darkness, but the lamp cast enough light to wrinkle silverly the flowing water in the aqueduct. Down there, in that darkness, one could house an army; two might easily meet there in secret. . . .

Slowly he pulled up the jug and placed it on the floor, then he slid the plaque back over the hole. God had given him that thirst to guide his hand to here, it seemed. . . . He bit his lip and glowered at Francis sleeping. Was this the sign for which he had prayed? his thirst the sign that had led him here?

As he sat in perplexity, he heard the shrill crying of roosters and knew that it was close to dawn. He turned his head and listened . . . "Before the cock crows, you will have denied Me," said Christ to Peter. But the cocks were crowing now and he had not denied Him. Nay. At this very hour of cold awakening life, God had revealed to him his path. He had proved himself stronger than Peter the Rock. Yea, yea. . . .

He went upon his knees and prayed, salaaming, head to the ground, while muezzins in their minarets cried down the cocks. And his

torment was now no more. In abnegation he had found peace, sorrowful peace, and was eager only for daylight that he might set about his task of martyrdom.

The janissaries had numerous duties throughout the kingdom, from the protecting of roads to the guarding of palaces, and Michael's duty was in the palace. Only because of his having heard Francis's name as a rower had he volunteered to sail with the galley, that he might watch his rival; and because Finch had asked if he might bring Francis with him to the palace had he gone as escort. Those had not been his ordinary duties. This morning he reported to his agha and was told merely to remain within call, for all was agitation about the escaped Christian. So he ate his morning meal of meat and rice with his comrades and idled through the hours until it would be possible for him to visit the harem.

The slow passing of time exasperated him for he feared lest his determination weaken. His all-night vigil had wrought him to a state of exaltation in which he longed only to prostrate himself before Bessy. He wished it were possible to suffer physically for her sake. There seemed to him no other way than by bodily pain that he could prove to her the fury of his adoration. Let his blood make a carpet for her feet . . . then she would understand and pity and, mayhap, love him for it. . . .

Yet this waiting. . . . He clenched his fists and sat on a marble seat in the garden while his comrades laughed and jested about him, throwing crumbs to the birds, teasing the peacock to make it toss wide its green glistening blue-eyed tail and to hear it give its shrill damned screaming. But Michael did not join their sport or listen to their lying tales of brawls and lechery. To him this garden was a prison-house. He glared at the lofty white gate carved with Arabic letters in gold and azure, at the stone pillars making a shadowed walk under the overhanging gallery with its delicate marble tracery. A fountain rippled in the centre of the green sward: built to seem a tiny mosque, it spouted water from around the cupola. Gardens, flowerless in winter, cut the green, but the trees were ever leafy—plane trees, cypresses, olives. This would be a paradise if he were here alone with Bessy. For the rest of his life, he felt, he would be happy, if he and Bessy could live here and shut the world away.

But she was never for him.

He was a monk to whom lechery was forbidden, although that oath no longer tied him, now that he had seen Christ. But training cannot be shed in a wish. For so long in his early enthusiasm had he crushed desire that it no longer burned singly as desire for women. His body trembled when he thought of Bessy, he was near to fainting often when he stood beside her, but that, he said, was worship of and not desire for her. The thought of embracing her was indeed revolting to him. It was beyond his conception because she was

sacred and one did not violate a goddess. In all his dreams, and he never ceased dreaming, he did not once see himself as loving her. Never, never. . . . It was always as her slave, her pretty foot upon his neck, that he imagined himself: her slave, her dog harnessed and bridled for her pleasure. Yea, he was but an animal worthy of naught but her beatings, so low did he feel himself beneath her.

He, the powerful Michael, Michael the Blind, who could kill a man at wrestling, knew only joy in his strength because that strength made his surrender to her weak hands all the more humble. The unicorn will bow only to a virgin. He was the unicorn sniffing the ground on which Bessy trod, and that she was no virgin, being the damned bey's concubine, was a fact he would not face. He just ignored it and called her Maiden in his mind. Therefore was this great sacrifice all the more joyous in its pain, that he would surrender her he loved to him he hated. There was no greater suffering: therefore did Michael gleefully embrace it, for by suffering only could one reach to God.

Now was the time. . . . They would have washed and dressed and eaten. There would be peace in the harem, the women with naught to do save a little sewing or embroidery.

He stood abruptly and strode blindly to the door. He saw no one about him, but acted like a puppet on wires, like a man in a dream. He did not remember going up the stairs or walking down the hall, but suddenly he awoke to find himself near the harem. Two negroes stood on guard, watching him curiously as they leaned on their scimitars. He shook himself to bring back his wits as he struck the gong on the table to summon the chief eunuch. He must seem as usual, must arouse no suspicions in that suspicious rascal. Therefore he sang softly and curled his moustachios, stamping down his impatience until the fat white eunuch came yawning.

"I wish to speak to the English sultana," said Michael, for such was Bessy called, although she had no right to the title.

The eunuch smiled, scratching his armpits. He was a tall, hairless man and very fat, dressed in red embroidered coat and baggy pantaloons; the essential quill pushed into the folds of his turban, for being not like men, that quill was necessary when nature would be satisfied.

"This is not your hour," he said in a babyish voice. "Begone, dog. You have come too early. I cannot understand why the son of the faithful should permit you to foul his doorsteps."

"You are not intended to understand," said Michael. "The less you understand the better, for you are here as watch-dog and dogs do not think. Their task is to defend their charges and that you do most worthily, my master. I would see the English sultana, and if you do not let me, I shall tell her how her servant ill-treats her slave."

The eunuch smiled and picked his teeth with a silver toothpick. He spat and the grain of food fell on Michael's sleeve, but he made no attempt to brush it off. He remained smiling, knowing how dangerous this creature could be, for he was the confidant of the bey when the great man loosened the mask of ruler and sported without his turban. Custodian of Felicity, was the rogue called, Guardian of the Girls, Porter of Pleasure, Chief of Eunuchs . . . all these and many even higher-sounding names had this creature because he was not a man, having in early youth bled with his chin above the sand. Usually he was friendly with Michael, but Michael knew that he must be wary, for the eunuch carried a scimitar and had the right to use it on whom and when he liked.

"You were a Nazareno once, were you not, pig of a janissary? And did you hear that two Nazarenos yesterday entered this sacred place?"

"I heard," said Michael.

"One was slain, but one was not found. Where could the dog be hidden?"

"If I knew," said Michael, "there would no longer be any dog to hide. Come, my *janum*, let me see the English sultana and you will find yourself rewarded."

"Why would you see her at this hour?"

"Because this is the hour I am free. This is my only hour to-day. Has the Son of the Prophet not decreed that I am her brother? There is talk of my being sent far off and I would speak to her before I go so that she may call down the blessing of Allah upon me."

"Why should Allah listen to her? She is no daughter of Mohammed."

Michael stifled his rage with a mighty effort and yet smiled as he said; "O, wise one, did not the Prophet love women above all things, save prayer? Will he not listen then to her prayer, having the two things he loves most?"

"You are a most persistent rogue," grinned the eunuch, "and I am weary of speaking with you, so weary that I can argue no further." He pulled a cord on the wall beside him and a door slid open. An old woman crawled to him on her knees and made to kiss his shoe, but he pushed the sole of it in her face and sent her sprawling.

"See if the English sultana sleeps," he said. "If she wakes, escort her to the Rose Garden. And you," he turned to Michael, and spat, "await her there, ignorant son of a bitch. I am sleepy and weary of all this hubbub about one woman. Why should an old man, and a good man like me, be forced to guard what is but the dung of a peacock? I have not opened doors for many years until this day."

"And why to-day?" asked Michael humbly.

"Because naught is right this day. Nazarenos soiling the Garden of Felicity with devils' eyes. How was that my fault? Yet am I blamed for it. The soldiers, you, should be bastinadoed! Why me,

a sad old bald-faced man? I fear what the master will say and do when he finds the second dog not found. . . . Get you gone to the Rose Garden . . . but be careful. You are watched. . . ."

"I will await in the Rose Garden," said Michael, salaaming, "O brave lion at the gates of paradise."

"Begone, liar and dung-bag. Out of my eyes with your spew-making image. . . ."

Michael bowed himself away, then walked swiftly down the hall, down some steps and into a little garden of trellised rose-bushes that were naked in winter. Shivering, his hot skin wrinkling from the cold, he leaned against a cypress and waited and bade his heart be still.

He did not move as minutes passed almost to an hour. He leaned against the tree, head down while he brooded on his martyrdom. Had there ever lived a knight to equal him? Christian or Moslem, there had been no knight so ready to make a carpet of himself for his beloved to tread to meet his rival. Man would never know his sacrifice, but God would know of it, and in paradise would he be given his reward. Then, only then, would Bessy learn of his magnanimity. Then would she see him as the noble creature he was and would regret that she had chosen fool Francis in his place. Yea, he would be patient and would wait till after death for her to understand his nobility and love. Would that were soon! "Only the thrust of a sword separates you from paradise," had Mohammed told his troops before fighting at the Oasis of Badr. Only the thrust of a sword, the pull of a bowstring, held Michael from the worship he would be given by angels, while an angel on earth did not love him as he deserved.

He started at the sound of footsteps and looked up to see that angel walking in a quire of devils. Bessy was coming to him down the path that shone with its different coloured pebbles crunching. O, lucky stones, beneath her feet. Slaves were about her, negresses and other old women, and one held a tall fan over her head, although the sun was weak behind clouds and the wind was cold. Michael caught his breath and sank into a low salaam, his forehead pressing into the damp grass. He had bade his heart be still, and lo, it seemed that it obeyed him. He was giddied by the rush of silence in his ears as he bowed, a slave at the toes of the goddess.

Tall was Bessy, but not too tall to fit into a man's embrace. Her golden hair was hidden in a sleeve of pearls and the veil swathed her face, showing only blue eyes in rims of kohl. Her sleeveless coat, buttoned with gold, was of red satin, and her shirt was of transparent silk, open from under the armpits and rippling nearly to the ground. An embroidered girdle with jewelled oval buckle drooped below her stomach, and the shirt-hem fell from under the coat to the knees and was lacy at the edges. The wide ruffled breeches were of silk, tight

above the ankles, while around the ankles curled gold rings tinkling when she walked on the tall painted pattens five inches high that made her taller even than Michael when she bade him rise, and he was no small man, being near six feet in height. So should it be, he thought, for he was her slave and she should be above him, like a goddess. He lowered his eyelids and sighed, unable to look long into her kohl-rimmed eyes.

"Well," she said in English, "you wished to see me, Michael?"

He did not look up, being yet dazzled by her eyes, and he felt his body tremble. Yea, his body was like that of a dog's when it sniffs food, it shook and trembled and his mouth watered: he smelt her celestial presence, inhaled it through the pores of his skin.

"I—I had to see you," he muttered.

Then she noticed the hurt look in his eyes, a sly excitement that made the pupils shine like polished stone, and she wondered if he were ill. Those eyes were like the eyes of fever: blind, staring and bright. Never had she seen him in such agitation. His hands were shaking and he could barely speak because of the quivering of his underlip. He glared down at the grass like a stubborn child holding back tears, afraid lest a kind word break his control and make him weep and be shamed.

She moved as if to touch him, being troubled by his sick look, then hurriedly dropped her hand, remembering that slaves watched about her and knowing that wives and concubines of the harem were peeping from behind curtains, eager to see any unorthodox gesture that they might blab of to the bey. She knew that she was hated because of the bey's love and that these women were all avid to betray her and that the bey himself detested these meetings and would be glad of any excuse to forbid them and to strangle Michael. For years now he had had spies on her, all promised rich rewards to catch her out, and therefore had she been most careful. So now she kept her hands at her sides and could console Michael only with the compassion in her eyes.

Was his love grown so great that the mere sight of her could shake him as with ague? Poor lad . . . she knew he loved her and she pitied him because his love would never be requited, not only because of the bey's jealousy but because herself felt naught for him but sisterly tenderness. Yet he was a brave noble-looking fellow, worthy of any woman's love. Only she did not love him.

"Why did you call for me?" she said in halting English. For always they spoke in English so that others would not understand, and neither remembered the language clearly. Michael indeed had forgotten every word until Bessy had brought back memory of a few phrases. And so that they might not forget, being so proud of their birth, they insisted on speaking it together and thus kept memory living. "Be yare," she said, "for this is not the usual hour and it has

set the women chattering. They are watching, you may be sure, from behind screen and lattice. What is it, Michael?"

Michael wet his lips and sneaked a glance at her. Her beauty pierced him like hot arrows of sunlight, paining his eyes. Never, he felt, had he loved her as at that moment when he would, of his own will, surrender her to another.

"Francis is here," he said.

He had not intended to say that. He had intended to talk of ordinary things and then slowly to let her know that Francis was waiting. He had not meant to destroy his intimacy with one word like that, so soon. Yea, with one word had he lost her for ever! And eagerly now he looked into her white face, as a wizard might peer into a mask to see if his abracadabra had brought life to it, both desirous and fearful of the end of his experiment.

Bessy stared at him, puzzled a moment, than a slow flush rose from her throat into her cheeks. She knew only one man named Francis, and he could not mean Francis Leland? What could Francis be doing in Alexandria? Was he a slave? both father and childhood lover slaves where she was queen?

"Francis?" she whispered; "not Francis Leland?"

"Yea, Francis Leland," said Michael harshly.

She swayed a little, dazed by the suddenness of hearing that Francis was here, and then she could have laughed because she realised that Francis Leland meant naught to her. He had been but a dream. Yea, she could barely remember him! All these years she had cozened herself with a dream, clinging to it as the one reality in a nightmare. And it was now, she realised, but a dream, insubstantial against the solidity of these palace walls. Only these walls were real, and these dark-skinned men and women. There was no England. She had only dreamed there was an England. . . .

"You mock me," she whispered.

"It is true," said Michael. "You heard of the slaves who yesterday came to the palace carpentering? One of those was Francis Leland. Were you not amongst the women when the dogs looked down into this garden?"

"Yea, I was here. . . . I heard the screams, but I knew not why. . . . I did not see Francis, or any man. . . . I was half asleep. . . ."

Francis had looked down on her and she had not known it. The thought warmed her with embarrassed delight and she flushed and wondered what kind of a man had that boy grown into. What had he been truly like, stripped of the dream she had built around him? She did not know. She could not even remember, for certain, the colour of his eyes, whether they were blue, or grey, or even green, it was so many years ago. And in a way she did not want to see him now. He may have grown fat, he might have a dozen wives . . .

and yet there was that other side of her that set her heart fast-beating at the thought of him, at the mere sound of his name.

He had looked down on her yesterday, and she had not known it. In songs and tales, lovers knew one another without speaking or even seeing one another. They smelled the other's presence in some secret fashion and knew without looking when the loved one was by. Yet her heart had not knocked the tidings when Francis walked in the palace. She had lain here half-asleep. . . . How had she looked to him? for he must have seen her: how had she been lying, on her back, her side, her stomach? how. In no awkward or immodest posture, she prayed, for she could not remember. And that was surely proof she did not love?

"Where is he?" she cried. "Take me to him."

"How can I take you from here?" Michael gritted his teeth. "Outside this garden, as you should know, are warriors and eunuchs and palace servants. How can I take you past them?"

"Yea," she sighed, "it is not possible . . . yet would I dearly like to see poor Francis."

Poor Francis! . . . would dearly like to see him! . . . Michael leaned against a cypress and gaped at her. She would like to see poor Francis! He was aghast even in his delight at knowing that, after all, apparently she did not love this Englishman. He had thought her more passionate in her devotion than just to like to see him. . . . Was she so little loving that she could talk thus idly of her beloved when he of whom she had sweetly moaned so often, with chatter of whom she had so tormented him, was but a few walls off?

"Is that all you have to say?" he whispered: "that you would like to see him?"

She, too, was puzzled, like one who reaches a mirage that she had thought was paradise to find it only fantasy. And she saw in Michael's eyes how she had shocked, delighted and bewildered him.

"It is strange," she said softly, "that suddenly . . . I cannot explain. . . . O, I cannot read my own heart and I thought it was so plain before! I loved that man and now I am afraid to see him. Why did he come here? To take me away? to rescue me?"

"He did not even know you were here," said Michael, "till I told him."

She swayed as if he had struck her. "He had forgotten me then?" she whispered.

"Yea," said Michael.

"Yet why should he remember? It is so many years ago and he must have met girls enough since then . . . prettier girls than me."

"Nay!" cried Michael. "There are none to equal you!"

"Dear Michael. . . ." She smiled. "You say that because you do not know England. There am I one amongst thousands. It is only here that I seem different from the others because of my white

skin and yellow hair. England has hundreds of Bessies, yea, lovelier Bessies than this poor Bessy."

"But the things you told me!"

"Dreams, Michael, dreams. . . ."

They were silent, looking at one another, Bessy sadly smiling and Michael gaping, stunned at the thought of hundreds of Bessies, all as beautiful, in England. And he was, queerly, angry. Was his torment of last night for naught? had he had no need to sit, torn betwixt love and murder, waiting for the cock? was he the only one of these three that truly loved? These lovers carelessly dismissed their love, and he alone had seen it for something eternal. He had been duped and therefore he was angry.

"You do not wish to see him?" he cried.

"Yea. . . . O, it would be joy to see him! I am trying to recall each feature, but my memory blurs. . . . Could it be possible, Michael? could I see him from behind a lattice, mayhap, so that he could not see me?"

"Not face to face?"

She was afraid of that. . . . Francis had forgotten her as she had forgotten him, save as a memory of love. Michael had just told her so. If they met and he treated her merely with respect, without love, she felt that she would die. The dream would then have been snatched from her, and after that, how could she continue living with these pagans? how bear the slobber of the bey's kissings closing her eyes and smiling to think that, while this beast could hold her in his arms, there was an English lad who loved her truly? She would have lost that power of living within herself, within that dream that made the bey a phantom of but slight repugnance. To lose the dream would be to awake in hell. Yea, in hell. And yet her skin tingled with longing to see the man into whom that boy had grown and to hear his English voice. . . . Mayhap her terrors were fools and he would love her again the instant that he saw her. Yea, yea, assuredly. . . . She would not be a coward. If she refused this meeting never afterwards would she forgive herself. She must and would see Francis.

"Face to face," she said, "dear God, if that be possible."

"It is not possible," said Michael. "There are multitudes of spies about us. How could you meet?"

"I do not know," she said, "but I trust in you, Michael."

He was silent for a long minute, gazing at her, then he spoke hurriedly, as though afraid the devil in him might hold his tongue.

"Listen," he said. "This palace is built, like the rest of the city, on aqueducts. If you could lift a water-hole in the harem you could come down to him."

"I couldn't! . . . we never go near the water-holes. The slaves bring water when we need it."

"There is no other way," he said.

"And I would fall . it . . is very deep down there."

"Are there no sheets to rope together?"

"Yea, yea. . . . If there were but one woman I could trust to stand guard for me! O, Michael, Michael! if only I could!" Now that there was a possibility of meeting Francis, the need became suddenly most urgent. God would protect her! Yet her heart was ice as she whispered. "I will do it. To-night, if I can get alone near the hole, I will lower a light. You will be watching?"

"We will be watching."

We. . . . The word strangely made thought of Francis vivid. He and Michael: they would watch in the darkness and her light of love would guide them. . . . But would herself go down? would she dare? . . . She would have to leave the rope hanging, the hole unclosed, and it might be noticed; while if the men should come up to her into the harem . . . Nay, the bowstring for both men then, without question, and for her, death by being tossed from a tower. . . . Dear God, it was difficult to plot calmly while her blood beat so warmly, so fiercely. She could not go down to them nor could they climb up to her. Yet she would try to see him, she must try, or her heart would ever accuse her of treachery to love.

"I will lower a light," she whispered, "when I have the chance . . . to-night."

"We will be waiting," said Michael, and both were silent in the pale sunlight, looking with dread on one another. But Bessy scarcely saw Michael, for she was thinking, trembling to think, of that dark meeting under the palace, and her body seemed to her to have rebelled against her will, it shrank and trembled as if striving to escape from her resolve, while Michael stared intently at her, trying to read her empty eyes. . . .

This was not what he had expected. She was not even grateful for his generosity. She seemed, indeed, sorry that he had spoken of Francis, for she was as white as death and her eyes were blank with fear. He had expected joy in her smiles, the excitement of a woman who is to meet her lover, and he was angry with her because she would not play her part, for now his martyrdom must be accounted less, his sufferings being less great. For, like Francis, she was not even grateful to him. . . . They did not love, after all. He had tormented himself for naught, and instead of being overjoyed to find that Bessy was heart-free, he became angry. After that night of hell, to have his gift accepted grudgingly as if it were of small importance, to risk a ghastly death that these two might meet and then to find that they did not really wish to meet, brought rage like acid to his throat. He could almost taste his anger. Here was he, fool, bringing them together to his own anguish, and they did not care! He was certain that had he had objected strongly, Bessy would have agreed that it would be unwise for her to meet her lover; yea! she would have been glad of the opportunity to shirk that meeting. And

that thought made him the more determined on their meeting. He'd not be cheated of one flame of martyrdom.

"Have you naught further to say to me?" he cried.

Startled, she looked at him, as if just awakening from a dream. "Only to thank you, Michael. What can I say? You have always been so good to me . . . no woman ever had a truer brother."

"Brother!" he cried.

"Yea," she said, "brother. What else should I call you?" Deliberately, she refused to understand the meaning under his angry cry, for she did not wish to bring his love into the open and have to hurt him by refusing it. Her own troubles were sufficient not to have the irritating pain of calming his.

"Yea, brother!" he said bitterly. "And there is no message," he asked, "to take your lover?"

"He is not my lover," she said gently. "We were sweethearts when younglings but the heart changes with the years. Yea, even suffering is forgot in time. And you yourself just told me that he had forgotten me."

"But you have not forgotten him. I have heard you talk so often . . ."

"I was unwise. Have you never loved a dream, Michael, clinging to it as the one thing to keep you sane, to compensate you for your sufferings? That was how I have been loving Francis, as men love Christ, God forgive me! Because he was something not quite human. Do you understand? It is so difficult to put into words. But you should know, you Turks are such great singers of love. . . ."

"I am no Turk!"

"Of course, of course, my coz, you are no Turk! But you know Turkish songs. They are always singing of love. And I have loved this man as a singer loves the person of whom he sings although that person be not real. That was the kind of love I had. It would make me weep yet would keep me happy, but it was not real. He was a lover in a song. How would you feel if a song came alive? Would you not be frightened, not certain if you really meant what you'd been singing?"

"And that is how you feel?"

"The song has faded yet it echoes in my heart. . . . I am frightened of seeing words take on flesh. Yea, Michael, I am afraid. Surely you understand?"

"I have never loved like that," he said. "My love was not a phantom though she be a goddess. Her feet trod on the ground and her body was flesh, if hidden from me. She was the song itself. I had no need to sing."

"Poor Michael . . ." she whispered.

"I do not need your pity," he cried, feeling tears itch behind his eyelids, and he glared at her. "Only now am I angered that I risked

my life to tend this man because I thought him your lover, and now you do not care."

"Nay. I do care."

"Does love balance costs? does it shrink from meetings because danger lies in wait? That, to my thinking, is not love. Love should seek love through a valley of jinns." He trembled and stood upright. "A fool was I," he said, "to believe the words you told me."

Bessy knew not what to say, for whatever she said, whether to proclaim or to repudiate her love for Francis, would equally anger him. And that was strange, for if he loved her, why was he not glad to hear that she did not truly love Francis? Instead, he was furious, as if he were the one rejected. . . . But she had long since given over trying to interpret his queer moods that were so like a child's. He would abruptly alter at a word, changing from laughter to a terrifying silence with threat of murder in his hands. She had noticed these frightening humours often, but never had they been so violent as to-day, for usually he lowered his eyelids before her as though she were the sun, but now he glared like an eagle and was not abashed when she stared back at him.

"Love is a dream," she said, "but often dreams prove stronger than truth. They make one do things one would never do if one first thought, and to say things, too. I am not certain if I love Francis the man or the memory of Francis. How can I tell till I see him again?"

"You will see him to-night," said Michael.

He was so angry that he did not bid her farewell, but curtly salaamed instead of putting his face to the ground, as a good Mohammedan would towards Mecca, his city of God. She heard him muttering as he blundered through bushes, his iron-soled shoes crushing pebbles on the path. She stood alone, not even looking after him, while her women watched curiously, wondering why these two had quarrelled. But Bessy had forgotten them.

Slowly she sat on the grass, crossing her ankles in Turkish fashion, and hugged her knees. Michael's announcement of Francis's coming had been so abrupt that she had not yet had time to shift it to its correct value in her mind. Either it was of such huge importance that all else was small beside it or it was merely an interlude that would later assume its rightful place as one amongst many things. She could not tell what he meant to her until she had seen and spoken to him. Love needs the sight of love to take on fire, although dreams can prove tinder. As a child she had worshipped Francis and had been so proud when he had bussed her in front of other envious lasses, for he had been the hero to them all: so brave, so handsome, so gay a sprig! How could she equate a child's worship with a woman's longings? Her mind had altered with her body's growth and she

would be now no longer satisfied with childish things, with mere worship of a man, content with a touch of fingers or an approving glance. Nay. She was a woman and her feelings were no longer simple and easily comforted; love had grown complex; it was not a single flame but a fire fed by different fuels.

It was dangerous, she felt, for dreams to come true. This was like magic, Francis's coming to Alexandria, and magic was evil, even to Moslems. And somehow she felt that her own desires had conjured Francis out of England and had brought him here, that unknowingly she had uttered some secret abracadabra and this was the result. Women in the harem were fond of telling stories of afrit and jinn able to transport men and women with a flick of their cloaks, of huge birds lifting sailors from ships, and although Bessy did not believe the claptrap, yet she felt uneasily that there might, after all, be some truth in it. Her heart, not her mind, told her that love was magic and that her magic alone had lured Francis to Alexandria, for she had always boasted about him to make herself superior to the other women and to torture Michael. Yea, quite deliberately had she tortured Michael, she knew not why; and the more the man had winced at Francis's name the more she had lied and spun the more fantastic tales : just to make round the eyes of women in the harem, to make poor Michael flinch. Of that was she ashamed, for she had never been able to leash her cruel tongue : there was a devil under it at times . . . and that devil had trapped her now into this perilous net. She both longed to see Francis and shuddered from the thought of meeting him.

She sprang to her feet to escape her fears and hurried to the harem, the slaves running with her; and once inside the harem, past the eunuchs at the door, she stood and wondered why she had returned. She did not want women about her at this moment when she saw them all look towards her and she feared that they could read her thoughts through her eyes. They all hated her because the bey loved her, and there was not one amongst them who would not gleefully have betrayed her had she known her secret.

They lolled on cushions, chattering together, or played with balls or birds or monkeys. Few troubled to work, and most of their time was spent in sucking sugarmeats and currants or guzzling the sickly sherbet. All had the faces of children, even the elderly women, with rarely a line on the smooth skin ; for what save pettish jealousies did they suffer? they had no heart-torments to wrinkle flesh to age. They ate and drank and spat all day, for whenever a person, an act or an object they did not like was mentioned, they spat. There were harem-slaves who did little all day but rub the spittle from the floor.

Bessy ignored them all and strolled to her silken pallet where it lay in one corner, and sat on it and sang softly to herself to show that her heart was at peace, for she knew that the slaves would soon be telling how she and Michael had quarrelled.

The women quietened their chatter when she passed, they smiled and watched her with open curiosity and contempt. Some were playing ball but they tossed aside the ball to look at her, their nostrils curling. And there was silence in the harem. But Bessy pretended not to notice, although she felt sick with rage and with hatred of all women. If ever she was redeemed from this barbaric land, she swore never to speak to a woman again, she so hated them for their spite and devilish tricks, their childlike cruelties and malice. And yet they looked so innocent, so like children, like little pretty boys, save for their long hair plaited with pearls and gems and threads of gold, for they wore baggy breeches and had coats similar to men's jerkins. Bessie hooded her eyes and tried not to see them through her lashes.

"What are you dreaming of?" asked a girl beside her. "*Bismillah,* in the name of the peacock! you look like a woman who has lost her lover."

"The bey still loves me," said Bessy, "at least, I pray to Allah that he loves me. I am but tired, tired of women's voices."

And she looked insolently at the girl, for this was one she most distrusted as being a fawning favourite of the bey's. She was a Kurd with long oval face and eyes that worried Bessie, for they had a blind look in them, the dark pupils being always up as if in prayer; even when the lids were wide, a patch of white always showed above the underlid. These lids were thickly glossy with kohl and the brows were painted across the bridge of the nose into one thick line, for she painted and perfumed herself ceaselessly, like most of the women, for they had little to do save adorn themselves. But Bessy had the sense to leave her English beauty alone, knowing that it was its difference from these others' that fascinated the bey. And they used perfume with lavish lunacy and went stinking richly up and down the room so that you could smell them both coming and for fully half an hour after they had gone. This Kurdish wench, Yilderim, Bessy noticed, had painted her cheeks scarlet, round blobs of scarlet, with no attempt to smooth the colour, to make it edge seemingly naturally into the skin, while her lips were so red and wet that she did not dare let them meet. She had blackened a dimple on her chin and had painted a line from the dimple across her throat, over her chest, between her breasts, to the navel, and down under folds of silk. Her hands were stained bright yellow, in the Persian manner: not only the nails but the whole hands and up the wrists were yellow, as if soaked in saffron. It was whispered amongst the women that this Kurd was dangerous, that she was a Yezeedi, a votary of the unnameable Shaitan in some peculiarly obscene fashion.

"Yea," grinned Yilderim with hanging underlip, "women's voices are like the notes of a pipe, sweetly sounding amongst other instruments; but many pipes all going together . . .! Yaw! one needs drums, deep drums, to go with them to hear the sweetness in their tone. Why do you sigh?"

"I am almost asleep," said Bessy.
"With your eyes open?"
"Yea, an English custom."
"And sighing? is that an English custom?"
"It is a custom everywhere when one is weary of one's company."
"You would be alone?"
"Yea," yawned Bessy and laid herself on the pallet, closing her eyes and fearful lest this creature overhear the thumping of her heart, for she knew that devil-worshipping Yilderim was the most treacherous of all the treacherous women in that harem.

Night seemed a long time coming, yet even then its coming was too swift for Bessy's liking. She knelt on cushions by the latticed window and saw the grey sky of winter trellised with the towers and minarets of the city, with mosques like women's breasts nippled to the sky, with flat-roofed houses and the restless palm-tree leaves and the minarets pointing up to that heaven into which Mohammed had climbed one night in the instant between the falling of a cup to the water in that cup slopping on the floor. Minaret behind minaret faded beyond the trellis, minarets curving with arabesques, balconied, and seeming to splinter with the shafts of wood placed as bird-perches, for all creatures were loved by Mohammed who had promised them entrance into heaven; minarets from which came the wail of the muezzins bowing towards Mecca.

Night was slow coming, and Bessy tossed between desire to meet Francis and terror of being trapped away from her pallet. At night, these pallets were unrolled, five girls sleeping on one pallet between two matrons to see that there was no wantonness together and no stealing out of beds without cause. Somehow she must escape tonight while these women slept, and usually most of them remained alert, even in sleep, to catch others in wickedness. She must trust in God, the Christian God more powerful than a thousand Allahs, and pray that the bey did not call for her. She did not hate the bey, she but accepted him as one would accept an illness that sickened one only at rare times, and he had taken her before she was old enough to understand disgust of her own body or shame at the pleasures into which it sometimes tricked her despite her vigilance. He was a thin old man, whose grey beard waggled in pace with his toothless mouth when he talked. He dyed it black, and sometimes the black came off and stained her fingers and her face, while his bald head was dented into hollows. He was too pathetic in his adoration of her for her to hate him.

And these silly wenches were jealous, poor creatures! If they but knew how his kissings sickened her! Georgians, Circassians, Persians, Calabrians, Christian-born most of them, they all detested her, and, as was natural, his wives detested her the most. The Prophet had decreed that each man might have four wives—but he

had excluded himself from that law, permitting himself as many wives as he had had the strength to sustain, and he had been very strong. "Of women who seem good in your eyes," had he written, "marry two, or three, or four," but there was no rule to limit odalisques. Therefore the bey had bought as many wenches as his pouch could afford, for he was never one to skim his eyes from a ripe bargain, and being lord of pirates, his opportunities were many. And of his women, he loved his English odalisque the most. Continually he chose her when the women were lined up for his night's couching, continually would he toss his kerchief on her white shoulders. He was unlike Mohammed in this besotted weakness for one body, for although the Prophet might love his little A'ishah above all—above even dark Zainab whom his friend Zaid had delivered to him, saying, "Take my wife : your need for her is greater even than mine," for he had noted the bite of his master's eyes on her—he had never varied in his succession of beds, taking each wife in turn, save immediately after a marriage when he would honour the new wife with three full nights together. The bey spent most nights with his English pearl, and had she been politically ambitious, Bessy could have ruled Alexandria, for the harem always ruled its master. That was why a wise sultan took women from the different provinces of his kingdom, that the people might feel blood-relationship with his dynasty. But Bessy had no such ambitions, she dreaded those nights and tried to hate the bey, but could not, for he was kind to her.

Hatred she maintained only for the wives and fellow-concubines. She being the favourite, they were ever obsequious to her, but treacherous. Their pleasures she disdained, save sewing and embroidery, for they did little but eat and drink and, when sufficiently bored with chatter, torment the slaves, tickling them until their eyes rolled and they wept and screamed, chasing them about the room with slippers and sticks and whips, or holding them down while they beat them in turn, for tempers were swiftly lost, if easily appeased, in the harem. Yet on the whole, the women lived placidly. You could see peace in their smooth faces, in their quick smiles and continual spitting, and they spent luxurious hours lolling on cushions and painting one another's bodies, dressing one another like babies, and solemnly arguing the most cunning ways with which to pleasure the bey or the husbands they would be given when they were twenty-five years old if the bey had wearied of them, for then would he often honour his officers and courtiers with a wife of his initiating.

Bessy lived quietly amongst them, protecting herself with dreams and her feeling of superiority, for she was English and a Christian. But none knew that she was a Christian. She had accepted conversion to Islam rather than suffer any martyrdom, nor did she find aught repugnant in Mohammed's teachings. Indeed, apart from his ban on wine and art and his permission for man to have four

wives and many whores, she could see small difference between his teachings and Christ's. These Moslems spoke with reverence of Jesus and of Abraham and Moses. They merely added Mohammed to the prophets and called Jehovah Allah, so that she could not feel herself a great sinner in turning renegado, while in her heart she remained a Christian and felt certain that God would forgive so unimportant a creature as her. Was not suicide considered one of the deadliest of sins? and if she had refused conversion, it would have been akin to suicide, for God alone knew what then they would have done to her, for they sold her as a concubine even after she had professed faith in Allah.

Likely enough in time she might have forgotten Christ had she not met Michael, for it was her effort to convert Michael that kept Christ living in her. But for Michael—she being so young when taken: only eleven years of age—it was likely enough she would have drifted weakly into apostasy. But now she treasured Christ because His presence in her heart raised her above these squabbling devils. Not only Christ, but the English tongue had Michael kept alive in her. Otherwise she might well have forgotten and by now have talked naught but this gibberish which they called language. Great fortune had been hers to meet Michael and to have for master one who loved her like the bey. Any other Moslem, from what she heard, would have chopped off Michael's head at the first glimmer of her interest in him; but the bey had understood, for she could always bemuddle him with chatter of English customs and weaken him with tears. Besides, she was not his wife, she was merely his concubine, not that that made the slightest difference to the bey's affection: she remained his property and could be thrashed, tortured, killed or caressed as he willed.

But he had been understanding about her need to talk with one who knew a little of her language and she had pretended that Michael knew far more than he did, for he remembered only a few words caught from slaves. But for Michael, she thought, she would have gone quite mad with only malicious women for company. He preserved her language, her faith in Christ and her memories of England, for she loved to talk of England which grew with each passing year into a paradise that would have amazed any Englishman to hear described. But there was only Michael to listen and he never doubted a word, for he loved her.

Poor Michael. . . . She sighed to think how she had hurt him, had hurt him with lies about Francis and now with the truth about Francis. Yet he should have been glad to know that she had forgotten . . . it was strange that he was not glad. . . .

She could not stay still. She squirmed on the cushion, pressing her face against the lattice, and her heart beat so fast she thought she was choking as she saw night darken the sky and the stars grow bright.

She stood to her feet and roamed over the tiled floor; from chamber to chamber she went, unable to remain still as night came nearer, crawling up the walls to lighted windows. Desperately, she wished she could hold back the sun a little longer. . . .

The women watched her, whispering together. It was her quarrel with the janissary that troubled the sow, they said, and smiled and spat: Allah be praised! they had quarrelled, she and her warrior! Yea, smiled Yilderim, they had quarrelled, for the wicked shall not triumph! In time the bey would see with open eyes, then off would leap their heads.

Yea, said the women, smiling, off would leap their heads; but their eyes slunk from Yilderim's, for she was feared. She was a child of Shaitan, the devil's own daughter of those flame-snuffers, the Chiragh Kush, who did strange deeds at Kerrund.

Yilderim lay on her stomach on heaped-up cushions and always she watched Bessy. Wherever Bessy went, Yilderim watched and smiled. At first Bessy did not notice the girl, then she went cold and her skin seemed to harden as she saw that smiling watchfulness, those heavy-lidded blackened eyes.

"Why do you always watch me?" she cried.

"Why do you always watch me?" said Yilderim.

"Because you are looking at me."

"That is why I look at you: because you look at me."

Defeated, Bessy turned aside, but she knew that Yilderim had not turned, that her large pupils above the rims of white never blinked; no matter where Bessy walked, those eyes never blinked away from her. This was not the first time the Kurd's insolence had frightened her but to-night it seemed to have a dangerous significance she dared not think of. Bessy turned her back and would not look round, but her heart beat fast and her body was cold while the candles and lamps were lit and the curtains drawn.

CHAPTER IX

VOICE OF LOVE

UNDER the city flowed the aqueducts. One great central aqueduct, enclosed within stone, ran from end to end, but from it branched smaller aqueducts to feed the different houses. It was dank and dark and stinking underground, for dead creatures lay in the mud—rats and lizards and dogs that had fallen in and could not escape. Into this darkness, Michael showed Francis and left him below with a loaf of bread and a lanthorn.

"You have water to drink," he told him. "Wait till I call to you."

He did not tell him of his arrangements with Bessy. He could not bear to speak of her, so furious did he feel after her casual treatment of his heroic self-sacrifice. The less interested she had seemed in meeting Francis the more determined Michael had become that she must meet her love. But he could not bring himself to talk to Francis, so great was his hatred. Therefore he left him in the darkness and hoped that he would drown himself in his perilous plight.

But Francis had no intention of drowning himself unless cornered by enemies. He stayed where Michael lowered him, sat on the wet ground, and waited, drawing the fetters up between his legs and tying them with a strip of his shirt to stop them clanking.

It was very cold and he shivered. Scraps of light like stars glimmered here and there through the crumbling walls or filtered from plaques carelessly slipped back into place. Francis blinked to make his eyes more used to the dark, and gradually he began to see a little—huge masses of stone that were the aqueducts and trembling scraps of greyish darkness that were weeds. And all the time he heard the murmur of water, the slap of water on stones, while occasionally light would burst yellowly down and a bucket would be thrown, then pulled dripping up again. The light would be blotted out and the far voices of Turks be silenced. High arches and pillars of stone surrounded him, troughs running one from another, and the ceiling seemed to press down as if with folds of velvet.

For hours he waited wearily, thinking Michael had forgotten him, and at last, to stretch his legs, he decided to walk a little. So he placed his lanthorn carefully on the ground that he might not get lost and stumbled off into the darkness, pushing his way like a swimmer undersea, arms out, palms back, so that he might not walk into a wall; and all he met were spiderwebs stickying his fingers and clinging to his face; and all he heard above the constant lap of water were the scurry and squealing of rats fleeing from him.

Wearying, he gripped an aqueduct and heaved himself on to its ledge to drink. Then he glanced about him, but he need not have moved from the lanthorn. He saw no more here than he had seen over there: darkness, grey shadows of aqueducts, and the sprinkle of sunlight through cracks, while he heard only the rustling water and scamper of rats. His lanthorn shone golden, far away, a pinprick in a black screen. He sat and wondered what to do to pass the hours and he shivered when he thought that mayhap Michael had left him here to die.

Michael's behaviour had been most curious. He had not bothered to explain anything to Francis, had merely pushed him to the rope and told him to climb down with a promise to rescue him later. But Francis remembered the fury on his face, and was puzzled. Last night before he dozed, the fellow had seemed to have talked his fury to self-pity. Now he had become a devil. Was he angry

because Francis had slept on his couch? But if that were so, he had had only to tumble him off. He had been so tired he would have slept gratefully on the floor.

That anger . . . why? Francis had awoken, eaten what stale bread he could find, then waited to be met by that cold fury. Anyhow, the rogue had not taken his knife, and if he thought to betray him, Francis could stage a battle in this gloom. There were plenty of hiding-places for a desperate man. He would kill a few before they got him. But if Michael intended to betray him, why not do it swiftly? why leave him here like this? did he mean to starve him to death?

Francis finished the loaf and was hungry again and still felt tired, despite his long night's sleep. Soon it would be night, not that that mattered in this darkness. Night or day, it did not matter, save that he would be robbed of those few patches of sunlight.

Gingerly, he lowered himself from the aqueduct and groped to a large gap in the wall where sunlight fell heaviest. It was obscured with a hard-leafed creeper and he brushed the fronds aside so that he might drink the sunlight. The air was cool and sweet with the scent of shrubs after the dampness of underground. He crouched there for a long while, just breathing and dreaming he was free, able to walk in light, to talk with fellow-men, even though a slave. Yea, he yearned even for the bagnio that he might hear the voice of John Fox again. But he would never see John Fox again, it seemed. . . . How could he reach him without being slain on the way? He was well known in the city and all must have heard of his escape.

He groaned to hear a boy outside whistle to a dog and the voices of men arguing in the grave fashion of Turks. Then fearing lest his lamp give out and he be lost, he scrambled back, tripping in his chains, sinking into mud, and scratched by bushes. Criss-crossing, above and around him, ran the aqueducts, raised high from the ground, and the water was like ink when he peered at it, swirling here and there against rough-casting or breaking into foam like spittle.

The silence was quite painful and he felt himself tense, as if waiting for someone to speak. But no one spoke, there sounded no voice but the voices of rats. He was alone in this huge cavern from which it seemed there opened no door, no exit other than the holes in the ceiling. And how amongst so many thousands would he know which hole to choose? If he could but tell which plaque was Peter Unticaro's . . . but Peter's was exactly like all the others. He dared not take the risk of trying to find out. By standing on the sides of the aqueducts, he could just claw some of the plaques but he could not push them up even had he wished to push them. No, there was no escape from here, and he grew bewildered amongst aqueduct and aqueduct until he reached the central one which was about six feet broad.

All Alexandria was raised on this honeycomb of bridges bringing water from the ancient Nile. This large bricked-in aqueduct with its open tributaries was boxed in by the walls of the palace. He might break through those walls, for already parts were crumbling, such as that opening at which he had listened to the passers-by and heard the boy with the dog, but it would be slow work and most likely would be overheard. But the large aqueduct must lead to lesser aqueducts outside, must run into a vaster crypt beneath the whole city. If he could reach this larger crypt, at least he would be outside the palace, and it might be a chance worth taking. It seemed the only possible way to freedom. He might even swim to the Nile, but that he doubted, for it must have been miles off. His impulse was to start at once, taking heart in God, when he remembered Michael. The man had saved his life, and might be now scheming some further trick to get him out of the palace by a less desperate expedient than the chance of swimming, hoping to reach open air.

He put out the lamp which was flickering low and crouched on the damp ground, hoping to sleep, but he was too cold for sleeping. All he could do was to sit and shiver and hug his knees and watch the sun dim behind the broken walls. There was one break quite close to him and apparently it opened on to the janissaries' guard-room, for he could hear their shoes echoing and the jabber of their talk, but he knew too little Turkish to catch more than a word here and there, yet from stray remarks he knew that they were talking about his escape. He heard continual angry curses on Nazarenes, and there was much spitting; and it seemed, he could not be certain, that they thought he had stolen outside the palace and was skulking in the catacombs that were hewn in the rocky slope to the south-west of Pompey's column. Detachments had been sent there to bring him in, he learned, and he prayed that they should not think to search these aqueducts. If they did, he would dive in and take his chance at swimming.

As night came to the call of the muezzins, he heard the janissaries at their supper. They made a tremendous noise, clashing on the paving as if in a race, then he heard the race stop, heard the smacking of lips and the banging of open palms on metal, evidently against the sides of their pots. While they ate, they sounded like dogs slobbering and belching, and Francis held his belly and groaned at thought of savoury rice with gobbets of meat, that being the common food. He strove not to think of it but the smell from outside was to him such agony that he could have wept.

Would Michael never come? was the rogue with Bessy, whom evidently he loved? Francis smiled even in his hunger to think of the fool's jealousy and he wondered into what kind of a wench Bessy Fox had sprouted. It was almost impossible, however, to fatten the child of his memory into a woman and to dress her in these Turkish breeches. He chuckled to think what Fox would say if he saw her,

Fox with his passionate love of Christ and hatred of the Prophet. Yet there were some of the Prophet's teachings of which Francis quite approved: the four wives, for example, although the lusty Prophet himself, from what Francis had heard, had set no bounds to his own harem. A jealous rascal he must have been! It was said that he had only made a gong for his wives because he feared lest a lover lurk in the desert when they tripped out at night on alleged callings of nature. The Prophet had liked little girls, had lusted after his favourite A'ishah when she was but six years of age and he had had to grind his teeth in waiting another twittering three years before her father had thought her ripe enough for marriage; and he had been so dominant in love that he had forbidden his wives to dare to marry again after his death. Yea, a brave old lecher had been the Prophet, and in that, at least, his followers followed him, as in their hatred of the arts, their refusal to limn or carve the image of man. But other arts the Prophet had hated were yet secretly treasured: music and dancing and poetry, for he had feared the wit of poets and had sworn that there would be none of them in paradise, although he had pampered some to use the sword of their cunning against those who mocked him. Had he not had slain a Jewish poetess, getting a blind old relative to strangle her? and another poet, a man, had he not had killed by treachery? and had not his first act on entering Mecca been to execute two people, a Moslem who had recanted and a woman who had mocked at him in verse? Yet Mohammed himself had been a poet and not even he could kill poetry in the East.

Nay, thought Francis, striving to keep his mind from the thought of food, Islam was not for him, even with its plenitude of wives. And they would only quarrel, he thought, and scourge him with their tongues to the sin of drunkenness. He would keep to his worship of our Lord Who had turned water into wine, for wine was preferable to a hundred concubines. He smiled to remember an old Turk he had met at Peter's. Before he drank, the old Turk had made a noise like a frightened camel to warn his soul to take hiding or to flee his body for the moment, so that it might not share the guilt of his throat and be defiled with wine. Nay, grinned Francis, he would remain Christian, if God permitted. Then he frowned and humbly prayed lest God should mistake his jest for earnest and leave him to rot in this heathen place. And Fox would soon be sailing. . . . It was that thought that made Francis squirm and shut his eyes as if in physical pain. That Fox might sail and leave him here. . . .

Sunlight had fluttered from the cracks in stone, the muezzins had cried towards the sacred city from their minarets. Francis sat shivering, wondering if he were deserted, when suddenly he heard the plaque move above him and light sprang down. Michael had not forgotten. . . .

Francis leapt to his feet and groaned at his aching legs while he drew the knife from his belt, and waited.

Michael tossed down the rope, then lowered himself down with one hand, the other clutching a candle and a bundle which he tossed to Francis. Francis did not move. He waited to be certain that this was no trick.

"Eat, fool," said Michael, standing on the wet ground. "Do you think I have returned to murder you when I could have left you here to starve with the rats? Eat."

Still holding his knife, warily Francis opened the bundle and found that it contained a loaf of bread with a pot of honey and, greater treasure, a file. He did not know whether first to eat or to free himself, but his hunger was too strong for delay. He seized the bread, broke it and ate quickly, dipping it in the honey, while Michael put down the candle and watched with the detached interest of a man who throws meat to a dog.

"I have spoken to the sultana," he said softly. "She will come to us when opportunity offers."

Francis stopped chewing in his astonishment.

"Bessy's coming?" he cried.

"Yes," said Michael, watching closely. "Is not that what you would desire?"

"My one desire," said Francis, "is to get out of here, now that you have filled my first desire with food. Why the devil is she coming here?"

"To see you."

"But she might be caught! She might be seen and I'll be trapped! Is she mad?"

"You were her lover once——"

"I tell you I was never her lover!"

"She has always spoken of you as such, although she, too, denies it now."

"I told you she wasn't. Why torture yourself by pretending?"

"Torture myself!" cried Michael and his hand clutched his sword-grip. "There is no torture in doing good, and I have brought you two together. That is the will of God, that I should be the link between you two. She will descend when she can, so we must be watchful that she does not wet her feet. Nor do I know which hole she will come by, but it must be somewhere over there, in that corner."

"I'll be careful," muttered Francis. "And thank you very much."

"Do not thank me," snarled Michael; "thank the Lord our God who placed murder amongst the seven deadly sins. Had I been the Turk I pretended I could with good conscience have killed you, for Mohammed exalted the sword. He called his people to him once and he said to them: 'Many are the prophets who have come from Allah, each to praise the glories of Allah. There was Moses who

lauded the great pity in the heart of God, and King Solomon who spoke of His wisdom and splendour, and the gentle Jesus Who praised the righteousness and power of God. But none of these prophets convinced sinful man, none of the miracles from Moses to Jesus could cure his wickednesses, so Allah sent Mohammed, giving me the mission of the sword.' Thus spoke Mohammed as he leaned against a palm tree in Medina, and thus would I have acted had I not learned that Jesus was not merely a prophet but the very Son of Allah Himself. You must thank Jesus that you live, Jesus and his good disciple, the sultana Bessy, who showed God to me."

"Yes," said Francis, watching the sword and glad that this madman had not brought his gun, "I am grateful and I praise God."

"And the good Bessy, when she agreed to see you, promised that she would break no commandments with you. Whatever her heart might believe, in her behaviour she swore to stay Moslem and follow the Prophet who made his wives take veils so that others might not lust after them."

"That is well," said Francis, glad of the darkness that hid his smile. So Bessy had only agreed to see him? She no more wanted this meeting than he had wanted it. This fool of a janissary was deliberately bringing them together and torturing himself by his own stupidity. He was mad and one had to be careful with madmen not to contradict their humours. So Francis said: "That is well," although he cursed silently, for his one desire was to get away from here and, somehow, to reach John Fox. He would be careful not to tell Fox of this adventure as apparently he had repudiated his daughter, for he never spoke of her.

"You, too, must promise," said Michael.

"Yea, yea, I promise!"

"You will lay no hands of lust on her? you will not even peer behind her veil?"

"I will do whatever Bessy says."

"And what I say?"

"I will obey you, too," sighed Francis. "But when am I getting out of here?"

"I know neither when nor how you can get out of here," said Michael. "After you have obeyed the will of the sultana you can stay here and starve and rot for all I care."

Francis shut his teeth, fearful lest he blab of his intention to swim through the aqueducts. He must be cautious with this madman.

"Before the Lord Jesus," said Michael, "do you promise to obey? you will not touch her nor try to lift her veil?"

"Before Jesus, I swear it," sighed Francis.

Michael leaned against an aqueduct, watching Francis carefully in the candlelight, not satisfied by any oaths. This rascal had sworn too casually, too swiftly for his oath to be from the heart. He did not trust him and still doubted if he had not come to the palace to

rescue or at least to be wanton with Bessy. Nor would he trust Bessy once she saw her lover and looked into his eyes. Had not the Prophet said: "Women were created from a crooked bone from the side of man. If you wish to straighten that bone, you will break it; if you do not try to straighten it, it will stay crooked"? O, to Satan with this devil Mohammed! Why was he always thinking in his words instead of Christ's, and Christ had forgiven the sinful woman. But the Prophet also had forgiven A'ishah when she had wandered from the caravan and returned later with a young warrior: he had believed her when she explained that she had lost a necklace in the desert on retiring for necessary acts. In anguish, because the suspicion of her adultery had threatened to split Islam into civil war, the Prophet had fallen into a swoon before her and had awoken smiling with the message from God that she was innocent. . . . Again! again those heathen teachings of his youth were brought by Shaitan's cunning to his mind! He must think only of Christ as Bessy had revealed Him.

Sweating, leaning against the aqueduct, Michael prayed for spiritual strength and gritted his teeth at the rasp of the file on Francis's irons.

It was very late. The candle had spat for the last time and the wick had rolled from the grease. They were in darkness and, it seemed, had waited during eternity, and even Francis had wearied of testing the freedom of his legs. They waited, shivering, until suddenly Michael started and drew the breath in sizzlingly between his teeth, while Francis looked up, listening.

A plaque nearby had moved, they heard it rock, then saw it slowly grow a rim of light.

"It is she," whispered Michael.

Francis watched and, despite his determination to reveal no interest in Bessy, felt his pulse quicken. The ascetism in which he had harshly striven to school himself was gone in an instant. He seemed scarcely to breathe, his muscles tense, like a monk expecting a miracle, as if he were a boy again waiting for the sight of his beloved. Yea, he was again a boy! for only in boyhood does one know such painful ecstasy at the presence of a woman as he knew then, watching the curved light grow above. He tried to still his heart, tried to breathe laxly, knowing that Michael watched with a hand on his sword-grip. Slowly Francis stood to his feet and straightened his legs to stop them trembling.

The arc widened, the crescent of Islam fading into the sun of God, and then he heard the whisper of an English voice and his exultation was such that he no longer feared Michael. Desire drove out all but the realisation that a woman was close, a woman who had loved him and whom he once had loved, when a boy.

"Michael," whispered Bessy, but they could not see her.

"I am here," said Michael stoutly.

"Shh! . . . they may be listening. . . . Come close."

Michael stood beneath the hole that now darkened as she leaned above.

"Are you not coming down?" he asked.

"I dare not. . . . Is Francis there?"

"I am here," said Francis and stood beside Michael.

Light being behind her, he could see only the shape of Bessy's head and the broken edges of her hair, then her eyes shone when she moved and he smiled and did not know he smiled as he whispered:

"Bessy."

"Francis," she said, and caught her breath.

They were silent, smiling shyly, like two awkward children who know not what to say.

"I cannot see you in the dark," she said.

"Nor I you. You are but a shadow. Can't you come down?"

"I daren't."

"But let me see you."

"Nay, but I would see you."

"I have no light."

"Michael . . . has not Michael a light? Are you there, Michael?"

"I am here," said Michael harshly.

"Have you no light, Michael? Please. . . ."

Michael turned away without a word and they heard him strike flint on steel, but they did not see the tinder glow, nor the slow lighting of the wick. They saw only one another's shadow, and smiled.

Then Michael brought the relit lamp and raised it and its light gushed over Francis, over his ragged beard and dirty face.

"Poor Francis!" she whispered sadly. "Have they treated you ill?"

"It were worth all the ill—for this," he said.

She sighed, looking down at him, and save for the beard, he seemed yet the little boy whom she had loved. She was surprised that the years could vanish while yet, within, she had not altered. Nay, her body had grown but her heart was still a child's. Those years were spanned in an instant and it seemed that she had never really lost this lad. Her love was the link over all that time, and she realised that through all the hateful years of concubinage she had been living only for this moment.

"You have not changed," she said. "Though I have grown, you have grown too; we have grown together and therefore we are the same to each other."

"And you, are you the same girl, Bessy?"

"Yea, I am the same as the silly jade who used to look at little Frankie and think him the equal of any man. But I have changed

in body. You would laugh to see me. In this land, men dress like women and women like men. I have breeches, although not fat like Englishmen's, those silly tubs you used to wear about your hips as though a cabbage grew round your waist . . . but silken breeches that reach nearly to my ankles. Is it not most absurd, my chuff? . . . I would blush to have you see me!"

"Yet see you I will. Lift up that lanthorn, Michael."

"Nay!" said Michael.

The two men glared at one another and Michael with his free hand half-drew his sword while Francis groped for his knife.

"Michael!" cried Bessy. "Why did you bring him here if you won't obey me? Lift up that lamp when I tell you!"

With trembling hands, showing his teeth as he glared at Francis, Michael lifted high the lamp until it shone on Bessy's eyes, and Francis caught his breath at the incredible truth—he loved this girl! Had he always loved her? or was this sudden love because he had so long not seen a woman? He did not know nor care. He knew that he loved her, and that was sufficient.

"Bessy," he whispered, "your veil. . . ."

"Ah, foolish veil!" she said and plucked it off.

Darkness as Michael hurled the lamp to the ground, sudden darkness that made Francis spring back and draw his knife, that made Bessy gasp and look in terror behind her.

"Never!" cried Michael. "You promised. He should not see your face."

"But it is different . . . he is English."

"I had your promise. Are oaths naught to you?"

They were silent in the darkness. Only the light from the opening above shone down and seemed slowly to dissolve about them. Yet in that moment when Bessy had pulled off the veil, Francis had seen her face, the face of the Bessy he had known as a child, plumper and wiser, yet the same face he once had loved. No longer was he afraid of Michael, he was but angry that the fool had doused that beauty.

"Michael," said Bessy, "that was cruel of you."

Michael sobbed as he cried: "And is it not cruel of you to look with dove's eyes on him and to unbare your face while I stand by? I am but Michael the fool and therefore you make mock of me. I am the fool who led this fool here, lulled by your lies, by both your lies, that you did not love. You swore you did not love! Would that I had never learned of Lord Jesus that I could slay you with good heart!"

"Then why did you bring us together?"

"I do not know. . . . I was mad. I thought to kill the poison in me by proof you did not love, to show you this beast so that you might no longer taunt me with your chatter of him. Yea! that was why I brought him here, for there seems no other reason. I have

been groping madly in my love and now I see the hell in which I walk. You love this man?"

"Yea."

"Then what you said this morning was but lies, lies?"

"Nay, I was not certain then. I had not seen him. Oh, Michael, Michael, you must understand! You are the only friend I've got. Would you desert me now?"

He did not speak but they heard his heavy gasping and his breath catch on a sob.

"Michael," she whispered, "you are English, too, and you are strong and brave. Without you, we are as naught. You must help us. You must."

"To sin?"

"Nay!" she cried: "to escape! I cannot live here now. I do not know how I suffered it so long, but now it is hell indeed to me and I will hang myself if I live here."

"You can never escape," said Michael. "Even if I helped you from the palace, you could not escape. There are hundreds of slaves in the bagnio, strong men, who dream of nothing else, but they cannot escape. Nay, you will die here, you will both die here. Your love is foolish, hopeless. It can lead only to death. You will be thrown from the tower, Bessy, yea! thrown down alive to the dogs, and your lover shall suffer slowly, for they are cunning, these Turks, in protracting death! And I . . . I, too, will die horribly because of this night. We are all doomed, the three of us."

Bessy shuddered and drew back. "Yea," she whimpered, "we are doomed. Oh, were lovers ever so sad as we! Would you had not come, Francis; would you had stayed in my dream; for now I will never know again even the sluggish peace I called contentment."

"I will get you out of here . . . somehow!"

"There is no way," said Michael.

In silence, in the darkness, they stood, with only that light from the round opening to show the dead leaves in the mud underfoot, the rough sides of the aqueducts in which the waters ran softly, and their own frightened faces. But Francis strove to put aside fear. Bessy had brought back England to him and he felt again a free lad striding English cobbles with English ships tied to the wharves. Somehow he must rescue her . . . he would carry her off and sail with Fox. . . . But what would Fox say to a daughter in the garments of the Infidel? . . . Francis refused to consider that. . . . He would take Bessy off, by God; and he wished he could tell her now of her father's plans, but he dared not. He felt the brooding hatred in Michael's bowed figure and he knew that the man exulted in the knowledge that they could not escape, that they must suffer now with love equal to his sufferings. Yea, all three were caught in the same net of passion and all three must suffer equally. That was the trick

of this rogue, that was why he had brought the reluctant lovers together. But Francis swore to cheat him yet. . . . If he could but whisper to Bessy alone! for this rascal would unquestionably betray them if he learned of Fox's plans.

"I'll find a way," he said. "Do not distress yourself, Bessy. Come here again to-morrow night. At the same time. Come prepared to leave this hell-house. I will be waiting and will take you off."

Michael laughed. "You?" he cried; "you, a slave! you will take her off, in the very beard of the bey! you will whisk her from under the teeth of all the janissaries in Alexandria!"

"Yea," said Francis, "I will do it. You will await me, Bessy?"

"I will be here," she said.

"I have been told that Christians are all mad," said Michael, "yea, and for once the Turks are right. The followers of Christ are all demented. . . . How can you save her, my brave fool?"

"I have full trust in God," said Francis.

"In God!" cried Michael. "So have all those poor wretches in the bagnios, they have great faith in God, and yet they rot, year in, year out, flogged by their masters, spat on by little boys, and yet they trust in God. And God does nothing. They are always muttering about escape with God's help, but God is too busy, He does not hear. And you? a slave with all Alexandria snouting after him, yet trusts enough in God to think that he can fly to England, over mountains, over the sea, with the pearl of the harem in his arms! Methinks you need that fabulous horse of the Prophet's for such a journey, al-Buraq, the Lightning, with the head of a man, the body of a horse with wings, and the tail of a peacock. But will Gabriel send al-Buraq to you at your whistling? Myself, I doubt it; but then I am of little faith, it seems. . . . I have sometimes wondered if I were mad, I, Michael the Blind, but now I know that there are others even madder and blinder than I!"

Francis did not answer. He had utter faith in God now that He in His devious way had brought him to Alexandria and to this harem to rescue Bessy. It was all God's work. He was another St. George and the sight of Bessy gave him strength like unto Samson's, he felt, and he could pull down this palace like the gates of Gaza in her rescue.

"Please," he whispered, "may I kiss your hand?"

"You would not quarrel with that, would you, Michael?" said Bessy.

"Nay! let the madman kiss your hand." Francis's calm talk of escaping had so astounded Michael that, for the moment, he was no longer even jealous. He was amused, if anything, at the prospect of the huge disaster that would tumble this fool if he thought to rescue Bessy. Where would he take her? to the desert, for both to become the slaves of wandering tribes? The jest was so foolish that

Michael grinned and watched without anger while Bessy leaned down and stretched her arm through the hole.

Francis leaped on to the edge of the aqueduct. He was quite close to her now. His stretched hand could touch her finger-tips. No more. . . . Useless to strive, to stretch until muscle hurt and bone creaked . . . he could just touch her finger-tips and feel her sharp nails on his broken nails. Yet in that touch was life. It burned on his finger-ends and raced his blood to thump upon his heart. . . . He could see her face dimly, the light being behind her, light crinkling the golden hair, enfolding it in an aurole like to the head of a saint in some old painting or set in glass, the light behind it burning through the colours, as in St. Paul's. . . . Yea, she was an angel reaching out of heaven, and he was startled by his own desire. Even to him it was incredible that he could have loved so long and never known it. The memory of Bessy, obscured by growing years, burnt as fierce now as ever in his boyhood. He saw her shadowed face and glittering eyes, the dark smudge of her mouth, the point of her chin . . . and only their finger-tips could touch.

By God, he swore, he would fight through a thousand janissaries to take her from this hell!

"Be here to-morrow night," he said. "And bring a rope."

"I will be here," she whispered, "but O, Francis, Francis! what would you do? Be not too mad. . . . They must not catch you. . . ."

"They will not," said Francis. "God has brought me here."

"I brought you here," said Michael, "and I am not God."

Francis had forgotten Michael and he turned, frowning, to look down. Michael was smiling under his long moustachios as if he savoured some cruel jest. "You must come down from there," he said.

"I am not your slave," said Francis. He put his hand on his knife but at that moment saw Bessy's arm stiffen, heard her gasp as she drew back. Her arm was suddenly gone and the two men stood in darkness, blindly staring, as she crashed down the plaque above the hole.

They did not speak but waited tensely, wondering what had happened, listening to their heart-beats and afraid that Bessy had been caught.

It was the Kurd who looked on Bessy. She was leaning against the door, wrapped in the curtain, and her eyes were smiling although her lips were straight. Bessy leaned on the plaque, trying to regain her breath although she knew that her face must be deathly white, for all her blood was hammering at her heart.

"You startled me," she whispered. "How long have you been there?"

"A minute . . . five minutes . . . an hour. Does it matter?"

"Nay," said Bessy, "it does not matter. I . . . I could not sleep. I came . . . You understand?"

"I came for the same reason," smiled Yilderim. "How white you are!"

"I am cold," said Bessy. "Why did you spy on me?"

"Why did you leave your couch?"

"I told you . . . why does anyone leave their couch? there is only one reason. . . . I could not bear it any longer and the more I tried to sleep the worse it hurt. . . ."

"Yea," smiled Yilderim, "love is a heavy pain about the heart. You quarrelled with your janissary, did you not? It is painful, this love, so painful that one must lie on one's belly and hang one's head through a hole in the floor. Yea. The women of my tribe live in the desert and they work like men, for they are strong and can kill another woman with their hands. See . . . my wrists: they are strong." She stretched out her arms, pulling up the sleeves of her silken shift to show broad wrists. "And in the desert," she said, "it is very beautiful. The heavens are blue as steel and the sands are always changing, and when we cease work and lie in our tents we are tired, but not too tired sometimes to steal from our tents into the moonlight, and if the sand shows the curve of bodies, the wind blows and the curve is gone by morning. Yea, we, too, have those pains you spoke of, little blossom, but we do not hang our heads through holes in the floor. But, ah! the desert has no holes save those we dig to bury those we hate."

"What is this talk?" said Bessy. "What do you mean?"

"Have no fear. I will say naught . . . why should you not whisper to a janissary through a hole? Ah, me, that is not what I want. It is the sands that cover one and hold one down, that I desire, when one does not need even the sands for warmth. Do not fear, little blossom. . . . Perhaps he has a comrade for me, eh?"

"You are mad. . . ."

"All women are mad. That is Allah's curse on them. But I think no evil, even though I see you whispering in a hole. I remember the words of the Prophet: 'Terrible punishments await those who slander a woman without proof'; and did he not add: 'Only those with four witnesses of adultery may denounce it'? I am not four. Although I have two eyes, two ears, I am but one. Perhaps, my eyes and ears betray me. I must have other eyes, other ears, with me when Little Blossom walks again and kisses a hole in the floor."

"You are quite mad," said Bessy.

"Yea," smiled Yilderim, "quite mad," and shrugged and turned away.

Bessy crouched where she was, unable to move for many minutes, so numbed she felt with fear. The bitch had heard their voices, but she had not guessed at Francis. She was thinking of Michael . . .

and there was no doubting the threat in her words: she would bring witnesses next time. And to-morrow night was to be next time.

Moaning, Bessy stood erect and took a deep breath before she was able to walk through the curtains to the chamber in which the women bedded, for this was a tiny kitchen in which she stood, used by the slaves to cook dainties between meals, and for that reason it had the hole to the aqueducts and was not used at night.

Oil-lamps suspended from the ceiling shone on the painted arabesques while the women lay in semi-darkness on pallets on the floor. Yilderim was back in her place, nor did she turn as Bessy on tiptoe returned to the gap between the bodies of two women from which—eternities ago, it seemed—she had so cautiously wriggled to her meeting with Francis. And there she lay and tried to sleep, listening to the heavy breathing about her, to the snoring and snorting of some, and to the rustle of silken sheets as women turned, muttering, in their dreams. The most terrifying of those dreams, thought Bessy, could not equal the horror of her reality with Yilderim waiting to pounce and Francis waiting with love for her in the dank underground.

All night, she did not sleep.

CHAPTER X

JOURNEY THROUGH THE DARK

WHEN, after many minutes, there came no sound from above, no fearfully expected scream, and the plaque lay undisturbed in its slot, Michael and Francis turned and looked at one another. Through the darkness they could see only the black shapes that were their bodies, rounded blacks on flat blackness. Francis remained on the side of the aqueduct, Michael stood on the sodden ground, and with the going of Bessy, her eclipse with the fall of the plaque, neither knew what to say. She had robbed them of words, leaving them poised in a void of silence, like two men who awake in wonder after an angel's visit, each afraid to ask if the other has shared the vision. Even anger was stripped from them, they were naked spiritually, unarmed after conflict, their hearts open to a blow. There only remained a faint irritability because neither knew what to say and both wished to be alone.

Michael moved first. He cleared his throat and spat. "What is this mad dream of yours?" he asked, "this dream of escaping?"

"It is a dream," said Francis warily.

"Are you gulling her with lies? puffing her up with expectations of freedom? Beware of dreams that take no accounting of truth. You

will but lead her and yourself to a terrible death. Do not expect my help."

"I neither expect nor need it."

"You are going to stay here?"

"I will be here to-morrow night."

"I said—Are you staying here?"

"And I said I would be here to-morrow night."

"You are mad if you think to escape. . . ." Michael stirred fretfully. The fellow was mad beyond question and would soon be tripped by the janissaries if he thought to get beyond the palace walls. And even beyond the walls, what resources had a slave, outcast even of slaves, to steal the bey's most precious concubine from the harem? Best to leave him here in this cage, to flee from all responsibility in such madness. Later, he must be caught. These aqueducts had been searched once, while Francis had been in Michael's room, and would probably be searched again when it was found he was not lurking in the catacombs, those galleries of pillared and sculptured stone with coloured drawings on rock, where the soldiers now were lifting lanthorns, poking into shadows with their silver-topped spears. Soon they would return and in the morning would begin again a house-to-house search of the city; they would not give over until the palace was ransacked, these aqueducts once more explored and patrols sent even into the desert. It was not that Francis was merely an escaped slave—they would have let an ordinary slave go by now, relying on hunger to bring him back—but he had violated the bey's harem.

Michael turned without another word, eager only to escape being trapped with the madman, and squelched through the mud to the knotted sheets, gripped them in his hands, caught them between his thighs and calves, and jerked himself up. Francis saw his pointed shoes vanish, the sheets wriggle swiftly away like a vanishing snake, then the plaque thudded down, and he was alone in that vast emptiness, alone save for the rats, the insects and the running water.

Silence seemed to press on him with cold hands, and he shivered. There would be none but dogs in the streets at this late hour—those savage dogs that were never killed because Mohammed had declared that all living things were stamped out by the divine, all had souls and would return to God. These dogs of Alexandria were masterless, fed because alms even to animals were precious in the sight of Allah, yet they were ever hungry, there being so many hundreds of them: dogs of all breeds and of divers colours, roving like wolves through the night, snarling and snapping and howling and barking in the streets, scratching at locked doors. Francis shivered to think he must pass amongst them with merely a knife for protection. But he had sworn to brave all terrors for Bessy's sake, and dogs, after all, were small terror compared to janissaries. Yet at this moment, more

than the dogs, more even than janissaries, did he dread the thought of diving into water on such a shivering night.

But delay increased his fears, crinkling his skin; therefore, before the traitor body could squirm back, he plunged suddenly.

The coldness stunned him for a moment. He had taken off his ragged shoes and put the knife between his teeth, and at that first shock, almost he loosened his jaws and lost the knife. Then he set his teeth and shook himself like a dog, blowing down his nose and blubbering with his lips, while gradually the ice thawed in his bones and he could feel the hairs settle on his skin.

He floated on his back, gasping, spitting, as he waited for strength to flow back to his muscles. Then he plunged to find the depth. It must have been about eight feet down, he thought. When he had his feet on the bottom, he had to jump to let the water buoy him up, and even then his head stayed under although his upstretched arms felt the cold breathing on them. And he was wellnigh six feet tall. The bottom was dirty, slimy, and little stinking bubbles rose and broke about him when he disturbed the muck.

Bobbing up and down, arms out, he half-floated, half-waded laboriously until he reached the brick-enclosed tunnel that led he knew not whither. Here the water rose to the top with barely an inch of air above, and he did not know how long that tunnel stretched, but he prayed to God that it was not far, not flowing under the entire city, but surely opening somewhere? Otherwise he would most likely drown, for there seemed nothing to cling to on the walls where he might rest.

He held himself up, both hands against the arch of the tunnel, floating and kicking with his legs, while he prayed and wished he had the faith of Fox, remembering Fox's confidence that God was his God and not his enemy's. Christ was greater than Allah, Christ would not let him drown. . . . Please, Christ, don't let him drown, he prayed, the skin tautening on his skull with fear. He was no coward when, sword in hand, he faced a man who faced him, sword in hand, but this journey in water led to the unknown where, for all he knew, the jinn of the desert might be waiting, for this was devil's country, land of the sworn enemies of Christ. . . .

Suddenly, he took a deep breath, tossing off his fears, and plunged into the darkness. He swam as swiftly as possible, like a frog, under water, lifting his mouth and nostrils up to the small space of air when he felt his ribs would break with the hot pain in his lungs. And when he rose, he touched the greasy stones bearded with weeds, and saw naught but blackness, no hole of light before him.

Quickly, he pushed forward, the flow of water seeming to try to press him back, for this, he reminded himself, was Turkish water and therefore inimical to Christians: jinn's water struck by some black Moses in which might swim beasts out of Crouch's sea-tales. And the thought of being grappled in that ink by some unseen monster

almost blinded Francis with terror. Man did not know the evils in his earth, and should there be devils anywhere, they must stride this satanic land where Christians were enslaved. When twigs, dried leaves or a dead bloated animal touched him, he almost swooned, thinking it skeleton's fingers or the caress of some living corpse; yet he pushed on, teeth gritted on the name of Christ, pushing out of liquid blackness into blackness.

His chest hurt as if ribbed with hot metal and there was the throb of a dull drum in his ears as water beat against them. It was difficult to drink the air: he had to throw himself on his back to breathe, to push up his chin and take a great gulp before he dived again. And always when he rose, he looked ahead for a light, and always he saw only the solid black, as if he were a fly in ebony. Even the terror of jinn was driven out before the fear, pressing between his eyes, that this tunnel had no end. He knew that it must have an end, even though it be miles off, as far as the great Nile itself, yet this knowledge did not exorcise his terror. And then he gasped to think that he might be lost, might somehow have turned round, and that he would swim only to find himself back under the palace from whence he had started. The tunnel had opened in two directions and, perhaps, he feared, he had taken the wrong opening, perhaps this led, not under the city, but into the desert. And how, even if it were under the city, was he to escape from it? how could he know which plaque to choose amongst thousands? He might find himself rise into the quarters of the guard. . . .

Up he bobbed for air, on his back, and found he rose not against stone but into air, that there was air all around him. He closed his eyes and took deep breaths. All was yet dark but that slimy arch no longer bumped him down. He could lie on his back, floating, like one risen from the grave who is too grateful for release from death to wish to move.

All was dark, as dark as in the tunnel he had left. Only the water shone when he broke it with his body, frothing a little. This must be under the city, after all; he had not reached the desert, the Lord be praised! . . . He sniffed the putrid air of rotting vegetation, and was happy, for it was as heady as wine to him. But now that he was out from under the palace and was under the city, his greatest problem began. Somehow he must reach a plaque, scramble up and face a household. No use in lying here, tormenting himself by brooding on probable dangers: it was best to face those dangers quickly.

He caught the side of the aqueduct and hauled himself up to sit on it. When he had first jumped into the water, it had been like ice; now as he rose from it, the air gripped his wet body in what seemed yet colder ice. He sat and shivered, water dribbling down, stinging his eyes as he peered about him, while his clothes stuck to his skin; and when he tried to move, he seemed to hear his bones crack as though they were frozen.

Slowly, he crawled along the stone edge, then realising that he must return if he would rescue Bessy, he ripped the arm from his shirt and placed it on the stone, where it stuck as if glued. But when it dried, it would stiffen and might fall, so he lowered himself to the damp earth and fumbled in the slime until he found a stone. This he pressed on the torn sleeve, then crawled on hands and knees along the edge of the aqueduct. It was quite wide, this edge, about a foot broad, but he dared not risk standing lest he fall, his limbs being so numb. Therefore he crawled like an animal until he reached a solid wall, a pillar straddling the aqueduct. He must trust himself to the earth now and walking there was dangerous. One could break one's leg in a pit or one's shin against a post.

Warily he walked, crouching, arms out, slowly lifting each leg and cautiously putting it down. His eyes were absorbing the darkness and he could see a little, whitish pillars and black arches overhead, and once, the stars above a well. He gaped up at their brilliance. They had never seemed so bright before, so many crushed into one small ring. The sky seemed pale behind their glitter, and he clenched his fists because he could not float up there like a bird. There was no way of getting up, no ladder, no rope. He saw the rope from the windlass curved against the sky as the bucket rested on the ledge, and he wondered whether he could throw stones and dislodge it. He even went so far as to gather stones before he realised that the attempt was hopeless. Apart from the difficulty of throwing sideways—for he was on the earth and the rope was naturally above the aqueduct, at an angle from him—the noise would disturb anyone near.

Glaring at freedom so close, he passed on into the dark. He seemed to have gained nothing from that swim. Even by standing on the edge of the aqueduct he could not touch the ceiling. Wearily, he stumbled on, praying without pause, for he had no hope save through God's mercy.

And God was merciful. For as he crept on, falling against lumber, and staggering up again, he saw another well overhead, the bright stars cut with the rope, like a crack in painted glass. He moved on a step before, with a gush of warning incredulity, he realised that that rope was not like the rope on other wells. It was not curved, but straight; nor was so much of it to be seen, merely a straight line. . . . The bucket was not resting on the side: someone had let the bucket fall!

He could not at first believe it, he dared not believe it lest he be mistaken and his disappointment prove too shattering. Strength tightened his muscles but he would not run. He kept muttering; "No, no, it's not; don't think it is; it's not," as he crawled towards the aqueduct into which that straight line cut. He dragged himself up its side, looking down so that he should not realise disappointment too rapidly, then he sat there and opened his eyes and, lo! the rope hung but a foot before him.

Strong rope. . . . He caught it in trembling hands and sobbed because he had not been mistaken. Like a child, he blubbered and smiled and twisted the rope, pulling up the full bucket, emptying it, then letting it sink again. It was strong rope, thanks to the goodness of God, and was threaded with wire. Made especially for him, yea! woven by angels, a rope like Jacob's Ladder tossed out of heaven.

He pulled on it and heard the roller unwind, creaking, groaning, and feared that it would unknot and fall, and all his dreams be broken. But at last it ceased unwinding and when he leaned his weight on it, it stayed firm. The climb, he considered, would be anything from fifteen feet to twenty feet, and that was but a handsbreadth to a sailor, even though he was tired and semi-starved.

He gripped it in both hands, kicked off from the aqueduct, and swung clear. It twirled about him as he dragged himself, hand over fist, the rope twisting between his legs, around his calves and ankles. Within a few minutes he was up and had caught the edge of the well; there he hung, taking deep breaths and gazing at the stars split with the windlass.

Cautiously he peered over the edge and saw the usual Moslem street of white blocks of houses, violet under the moon. Not a window gleamed, not a door was open. All was silent as a deserted city. He dragged himself up and out of the well, and heard dogs barking, so he took the knife from between his teeth, although he feared it would be but small protection, for the creatures roamed in herds, each herd keeping to its own territory, patrolling different streets under a leader.

Francis leaned against the wall, breathing deep of the desert air, while the city slept behind ghost-like walls. He heard the distant cry of sentinels from the palace, and the rattle of shutters on a window as the wind tapped by and, quite near, the snarling of a dog.

Then to the right he saw the low-pointed tumbling-down pyramid, and knew that Peter Unticaro's shop was somewhere near.

Straightening himself, holding back his shoulders, Francis strode into the moonlight and dodged to the shadowing wall. Other dogs had joined the one he had first heard. They were fighting amongst themselves, probably over some carrion, and Francis drew off his shirt and twisted it about his right arm, still holding the knife ready for stabbing, point up.

Alexandria, he knew, was badly patrolled, the watch preferring to sit indoors than to wander the streets and fight with dogs, and the dogs were the real custodians of the city. They were the alert watchmen ever sniffing for strangers, tearing down the thief and adulterer. But to-night, Francis knew, there would be soldiers out seeking him. They had probably finished with the catacombs by now and might be returning any moment. By the slant of the stars he could tell that it was late, and dawn might blink on him before he reached safety, for he had lost all knowledge of time. But the

stars suggested that it was about three or four o'clock and, being winter, the dawn would come late.

He slid through shadows, pressing against the walls, and his own footsteps, barefoot though he was, sounded absurdly loud when he stumbled on twigs or squelched in mud. This part of the city was strange to him, but by keeping the pyramid always ahead, he made for the centre, through streets and alleys and lanes, until he knew that he must be somewhere near Peter's stall. Then he stood silent, holding his breath as he gulped down fear, for in the street at the end of the lane in which he stood, about twenty lean dogs snarled over carrion.

Moonlight shone as bright as day, casting shadows, sharp-edged as if cut from paper, over mauve cobbles. He could see each beast clearly, the markings on their bodies, the dribble from their jaws, and the occasional glitter of their eyes when the light slanted on the pupils and silvered them like glass. He raised his hand in readiness, the shirt swathed about the forearm, and waited for the beasts to scatter. They were leaping on top of one another, whining and snapping, in their eagerness to get at the food; then one suddenly lifted its long snout and showed its teeth, black gums crinkling, as it sniffed the air, snuffing the odour of man. It cried deep in its throat and turned and looked at Francis. Other pointed heads lifted, other eyes glinted, tongues lolled over yellow teeth, as the pack turned to look at Francis.

One great yellow brute slouched forward and paused, head down, back ruffled up, as if it were a Turk at prayer. Slowly it writhed over the cobbles, eyes fixed on Francis as he raised the knife. It crawled closer, as though uncertain whether he were friend or foe, while its mates watched; then suddenly, it sprang. Francis was ready; he leaped aside and twirled his shirt, the cloth catching the beast on its side and knocking it spinning over so that it fell, half-blinded, flung off its balance by the abruptness of his attack.

It lay quiet, snorting a little, rolling its head as though it were surprised in its dignity that a man should dare retaliate. The other dogs did not move, but they growled softly, crouching on their paws, like groundlings at the playhouse ready to hiss the players. This was like a duel in ancient times when two champions fought before both armies, but Francis's army was merely the wall behind him that assured him against treachery.

Then as he stood panting, his face, despite the cold, stinging with sweat, he was amazed to see the creature he had fought lurch on its paws and turn its back on him. They were curs after all, these outlaw-dogs! The beast slouched off, body arched, then flung itself, snarling and snapping, amongst the herd, as if to fight down incipient mutiny.

Francis slid quickly by, astonished at the humanity of the beasts. Like men, they lost courage when their leader fell and the leader's thought was more on keeping his people from mutiny than on con-

quering the enemy. They were snarling, bickering, amongst themselves and took no heed of him, yet he went with head turned in fear lest they leap on him from the back, until at last he reached the shop of Peter Unticaro.

It was closed, as he had expected: not a blink of light came through the shutters nor from the latticed windows on the floor above.

Eagerly, Francis fumbled with door and shutters, but they were firmly bolted, and he dared not knock lest he wake up others in the street beside his friend. The dogs were still squabbling together but they might suddenly combine to turn on him, and now that he had reached his goal and found himself shut out, Francis became quite frenzied. Panic which he had held down while he swam now broke his will and shook his limbs, chattered his teeth, and he feared he would scream.

A dog sniffed close, but he did not care. He was in too great a fear of being caught by the janissaries to be afraid of the most savage dog. He kicked at the beast, cursed it, and it crawled back a little on its belly. Its mates were joining it, crouching in a ring about him, silent, as if mystified by the antics of this man. For Francis was pulling at the shutters, wrenching at the door, and was sobbing and muttering and cursing, quite mad for the moment. Some damned Turk had but to look out of his window to see him and then he would be taken and tortured, and he would embroil poor Peter in his trouble. . . . Peter! Peter! why did you lock your doors so firmly! The janissaries must have finished their search of the catacombs, they would be coming back, some secret drinker might stagger by. . . . Wake, Peter, wake!

Gasping with fury and despair, Francis stood back in the moonlight and spat at the dogs. They but growled and slunk away, then crouched again, resting their muzzles between their paws, watching him. He had beaten their leader and it seemed that now he had taken that leader's place, that they were soldiers awaiting his commands. In a semi-circle they crouched and watched, were-wolves in their intelligence, animal-skinned men tamed by a wizard; but they merely exasperated Francis. They could not open doors and therefore to the devil with them. He was but surprised that he had ever been scared of the curs, as he stood back, panting, trying to control his shaking limbs and to still the clamour of his heart.

He must think, he must not grow desperate and betray himself to sleepless Turks. He must prise open the shutters even at the risk of being killed by Peter in mistake for a thief. There was naught else to do, as he dared not knock or call. He slid his knife between the shutters and pulled, but he merely broke the blade. There was a shaft of it left, so he slid that in and pulled again with all his weight and heard the wood give, creaking a little.

"Who ees that?" cried Peter.

Francis sobbed in relief as he stood back into the roadway, stumbling on the dogs to get into moonlight, so that Peter could see him.

"It is I," he whispered.

Peter was in the window, a club in one hand, and even though his face was shadowed, Francis could see the amazement in the sudden way he went limp.

"You. . . ?" whispered Peter. "Wait, wait. . . ."

He was gone from the window, then the door was unbolted, unchained and opened, and Francis sprang within, pushing the door fast on the dogs. He heard them howl as if to call him back, and one scratched on the woodwork.

"I thought you wiz dead," gasped Peter, setting the candle on the table and looking closely at his friend. "I hoped you wiz dead, queek dead, for they look for you. *Si*, they search, devils; they reep up my bed. Thank the good God they not catch you."

Francis sat, shaking, on the stool and smiled like an idiot.

"They have not caught me yet," he said, "blessed be God. But, Peter, I am frozen. Have you no strong waters? There is a cold fever in me that needs fuel."

"But wait." The Spaniard hurried off with the candle to the kitchen at the back and Francis could hear him rummaging amongst bottles. Francis felt suddenly very tired, and he yawned. As yet he could not quite believe he was safe. Everything was sharply distinct yet seemingly transient, as though he dreamed. Then Peter returned with an earthen cup painted green, in the Turkish fashion, to neutralise poisons, and Francis eagerly seized it and drank deep, shuddering as the spirit seemed to burn inside his skin.

"Ah, ha!" grinned Peter, "that would breeng a killt man back to thees life, poor devil. I make eet myself. Eet ees called the Breath of the Virgin. Ees eet not sweet?"

"Very sweet." sighed Francis. "Peter, friend, you must forgive me. I have perhaps brought great misfortune on you by coming here, but where else could I have gone?"

"But where?" shrugged the Spaniard.

"So please forgive me, for I have been through wonderful adventures, too long to tell now, for I am vastly weary. But I have been in the bey's palace and have broken out. . . . I must see Fox!"

"No, no-o-ot yet. You must wait. Eet ees night-time. I weel bring him in the sunlight."

"Yea," said Francis, "for I am tired. You will let me sleep here, Peter? You don't mind? But I have been through hell and there is hell before me. I—I . . . there is a girl in the palace, one of the wives . . ."

"Jesu!" cried Peter, goggling with horror.

"Yea," said Francis, "John Fox's daughter."

Peter could only gape at him as if he were mad. "He tell me hees daughter dead!"

"Yea," said Francis, "but she is alive beyond question. He meant that she is dead to him. For her to be a Moslem. . . . You understand?"

"*Sí*," whispered Peter.

"But we can't leave her behind, she must come with us!"

"He weel keel her," muttered Peter.

"His own daughter. . . !"

"He weel keel her," said Peter quietly, and his face was very white. "You do not know Juan Fox. That ees one theeng he nevah forgiff. He weel keel her, a Turk; Juan's bambino, a Turk!"

"But we can't leave her there!"

"No. . . . We must not theenk of eet now. In the morning. Come, come, my brave caballero, you must sleep. . . ."

He put his arm around Francis and helped him to his feet, and now that perils were past for the time, Francis felt too weary to stand. He stumbled up the stairs and sighed gratefully as he fell on to the hard couch in Peter's bedchamber. He slept at once, but Peter did not sleep. He sat in the darkness, alert for the sound of janissaries in the street, afraid of what John Fox would say when he learned that this foolish lad had met his daughter in the bey's harem.

He was still sitting there in a torment of fearful perplexity when dawn came and the muezzins cried from the minarets on Allah; then he groaned and stood up and looked with anger and pity on sleeping Francis. He could not blame the lad, but now when escape was planned, the galleys home . . . now must he come with talk of Juan's daughter when Juan had always sworn he had no daughter living.

CHAPTER XI

MY RUSTY SWORD

JOHN FOX slouched into the chamber, Peter sweating at his heels, and Francis sprang from the bed, arms out to greet him. Fox stood with head down, frowning, nor did he look at Francis, and Francis felt his limbs turn watery with fear. Peter had gone to fetch Fox and to tell him what he thought fit of Francis's adventures, and now there could be no doubting Fox's disapproval. As Moses must have stood before the dancing Israelites when he had trudged down from Sinai with his precious tablets, so now did John Fox stand before Francis, ignoring his offered embrace.

"John," whispered Francis, "look at me."

"I'd not have come," said Fox, "if Peter had not pressed me."

"Look at me, John. . . . Why should you hate me? I have been through hell, and now you turn your eyes from me."

"I have heard tales of you," said Fox, still staring at the floor. "The janissaries sought me out, thinking me your friend. Half the night they have been asking questions of a so-called Christian who spied on women. Yea, heathen though they be, they be yet Sussanahs to your lewd looking."

"I knew naught of it, it was Finch. . . ."

"Finch was a limb of Satan but he was not alone in his gloating on the whores of the harem. He paid for his sin. Pity you did not pay with him."

"But, John, I am not to blame. You know with what reluctance I left that morning. How can I be blamed if Finch was mad? He drew a knife on me, he forced me to go with him, I didn't know what the fool was doing until he led me to the lattice. Before God, John Fox, I am not to blame!"

"You spied upon the women. . . . Now, of all times, when our adventure is ripe, you must send the damned janissaries to poke through the bagnio, now when the galleys are in, now!" He raised his eyes and glared at Francis who stood back, trembling before that scorn. "Yea," said John Fox, his voice growing stronger, for always he found strength in words, seeming to become drunk on them until he reached an ecstasy in which even his listeners were forgotten. "And you," he cried, "must risk the hopes of hundreds of poor Christians merely that you might lick your lips at sight of heathen skin. And you dare ask for my forgiveness!" With a grimace, he turned to Peter and shrugged as if shrugging Francis away. "Verily," he said, "this boy is mad."

"He ees young," whispered Peter, watching him with big pleading brown eyes. "No, Juan, pliz, he meant no sin."

"No more than did the idolaters before the Golden Calf," jeered Fox, "yet did not God say to Moses: 'Whoso has sinned against Me, I blot him from My book'? and did He not send plagues on them because of their carnal wickednesses? did not Moses melt that Calf and made them drink of it? and did not the Lord say: 'Get you on your journey alone, but I will not go in the midst of you, for you be stiffnecked fools'? And this silly boy here with his peeking at punks has brought on us the ungodliness that fell on Israel. Can one forgive a fool who shuts God's face from us?"

"But, John," stuttered Francis, "please, look at me, please. . . . Did not Moses with his prayers turn God's wrath from the sinners, for they knew not what they did? And on my soul's health, I swear I knew not what I did!"

But Fox would not look at him. Stubbornly, he turned his back, and when he spoke, it was to Peter, as if Francis were not present.

"Do you remember, Pete," he said, "how that poor Moses wrestled for his people's sake that weren't worth the saving? He had to commune with God on the mountain for forty days before God'd listen to him and that must have been a painful monologue for Moses. We cannot wait another forty days, can we, Pete? Nor am I Moses. That boy, that Francis Leland, whom I thought I loved . . . you remember how I gabbed of him, as if he were my son? . . . that boy has brought such shame on us Christians that we're no worthier now in God's eyes than the circumcised dogs of Turks themselves. Yet, God save my soul, he asks me to forgive him!"

"He ees young," whispered Peter.

"John!" In torment, Francis went on his knees and caught Fox by the thighs, gripping him tightly so that he could not move. "I swear to you," he cried, "I did not sin, I meant no sin. Before God, I speak truth. I'll not go until you hear me out! I did not know what Finch would do."

Calmly, Fox looked down at him but made no attempt to struggle free, as if even to touch Francis would degrade him, and his lower lip poked over the upper, his nostrils widened.

"Up from your knees!" he said. "I am not God that you should kneel to me. Up, blasphemer!"

"But listen . . ." wailed Francis.

"Get up," said Fox. "On two knees to God, on one to your sovereign, and I am neither God nor king. Get up!"

Although his voice was low, it was the voice of command, and Francis drew back in despair. His weariness, the terrors he had passed, all seemed to strike him physically, and he swayed, as weak as a girl, and tried not to weep, for his life was twisted, it seemed, beyond his straightening.

"If you desert me," he whispered, "I am lost. I can fight no longer."

"Fight?" said Fox scornfully; "you cannot fight. I thought you'd won against Satan but a whisper from that creature Finch was sufficient to bust down all your defences. Fight? You are wide open to the devil; he sits crowned on your heart. I do not hate you, you are just weak, not worth the hating, for it takes a devil to sin tremendously and to be worthy of our hate. You? you are but a fly without wings. At the whisper of women you must creep after Finch, following the spoor of lust, not caring for your fellows, not caring for the adventure I was fool enough to tell you of. Get you gone and follow your lusts! You are no good to me."

He turned aside, spitting and hitching his shoulders, and the weariness suddenly went from Francis. Rage flooded it out of his limbs. He glared at Fox, not caring what he said, ready to fight him if need be, but determined that he should listen to him.

"I'll not be spurned like this!" he cried. "Turn again, John Fox! By God, I'll make you listen!"

He ran ahead of Fox and stood, panting, in the doorway.

"I'll not have you misjudge me!" he cried. "Who are you that you would take God's seat and judge a man unheard? Can you read my heart? do you know the secrets in my brain? Nay! so you will listen to me! I'll not take your blame without a hearing. I went with Finch. You saw me, you know I did not want to go and was amazed when called for. We had to go to work in the palace, to carve a screen, and while I worked, that devil Finch opened the door with some tool he had and led me along to a grille through which the women were. How was I to know it? I was unarmed and he had two knives. I was trapped there with him. The fool paid with his life while I . . . I was not so fortunate. . . ."

Fox was listening scornfully with curled nostrils, now he raised his eyebrows as he glanced at Peter.

"A pretty tale," said he. "I suppose the elders just went to smell the flowers when they spied on Susannah in her tub? I suppose King David was just doing a little carpentering on his roof when he peeked over and saw Bathsheba in her bath and lusted for her? Yea, you can't really blame adulterers when naked women are always waylaying the poor sinful devils. . . . Hope you enjoyed yourself in the bey's brothel, boy."

"There are times," said Francis, "when I could kill you, John, you are so stubborn, judging without hearing the accused. Even the damned Ottomites have more of Christ's pity than you, for it was an Ottomite who protected me, who fed me. Though I must plead his forgiveness for calling him Ottomite, for he was a Christian, a better Christian than you, for he was charitable."

"A Christian?" Fox, for the first time, looked full at Francis. "A Christian," he cried, "in the seraglio? what does he there?"

"Befriends poor Christians like myself," said Francis. "Shamed am I to say that that janissary, a servant of the devil yet with Jesus in his heart, loving Him in secret like the persecuted in the days of Nero, shamed am I to say that he was a better Christian than you, John Fox."

"Come, come," said Fox, "tell me of this man." The rage was gone from his eyes in his eagerness to learn about this godly phenomenon, a Christian janissary. He clicked his fingers, urging Francis to speak. "Here be glad news!" he cried; "for the angels in heaven rejoice at a sinner plucked from the burning. How learned he of our Lord?"

"He is English by birth," said Francis gloomily, angry that Fox could reject him yet tremble like a leashed hound at the mention of Michael. "A Christian born," he said, "he now bitterly repents his apostasy. But the Turks reared him and taught him to worship the devil until later his eyes were opened on the truth."

"This is indeed a miracle!" cried Fox, "for God to come into the hell-house itself to pluck out a soul! This is as great a miracle as

any in the Holy Book! Would we could take the lad to England with us and show the Queen and the clergy how God works wondrously. They would flock in their thousands to see him, by my fai'! the Moor plucked out of Alexandria by God! How learned he of God! was it by some miracle? did God come to him through a book or did He blind him suddenly with the truth? Come, tell me, lad."

Francis shuffled from his glare, blushing and lowering his eyes, for he dared not tell the truth about Bessy after Peter's warning. Fox had rejected her, Peter had said, and at the mere sound of her name rage frothed in him because she had turned Moslem and was concubine of the bey. He saw Peter watching him with warning looks and he stuttered as he said:

"A Christian slave girl taught him in secret. That is all I know."

"A Christian girl there, too! martyrs in that hell-house and I knew not of it!" Fox gaped, amazed, then muttered in hurt tones: "Nobody told me, and here I've been conspiring years to save souls and yet I knew not of these two. They might have helped . . . a janissary could have brought us weapons, might have drugged the guard! Why did You not tell me of this earlier, O Lord?"

"God tell you now," whispered Peter, "God come, He say you canno' leaf Alex and not take theem. That ees why God send thees boy to the palace. *Sí*, thees is God's work, Juan."

"Yea," said Fox, "'tis wondrous how He works. . . ." Slowly he sat down on a stool and gazed blindly at Peter, his mouth open, while he ruffled his beard with his fingers. "Indeed, most wonderful!"

"Eet ees the work of God," said Peter.

"Yea," said Fox, "so it would seem. On this very day, the last day of all, God reveals to me His people in that hell-house. . . . And he uses the lust of that boy for instrument. A Christian slave girl reaping souls under the devil's very eyes! O Lord, this be right precious news! . . . Who is this she-saint, Frankie?"

"I . . . I do not know," said Francis, gazing at the floor, for he dared not meet Fox's eyes. There was something in that blind stare of his that made you feel that he could read your soul. You could not lie to such a man. Therefore, Francis looked on the dust on the boards at his feet, for he knew that if he lifted his eyes he would be paralysed into telling the truth. He mumbled: "The janissary told me of her . . . how she taught him God's word. He . . . he wants us to take her away so that she can worship with her own people. It is not right that a saint should suffer amongst the devils. She must be saved, John!" At last, he dared to look at him: for Bessy's sake he looked boldly at Fox as he cried, "She must not be left behind!"

"Nay, nay," said Fox, "and yet a woman amongst so many men. We might be weeks at sea, months. . . ."

"You would be there to shield her."

"Ay, and yet . . ."

"A Christian, John, living in hell. You swore to leave no Christian in this vile city. Many a time in my sinful impatience did I plead with you to escape, but always you told me in your wisdom that we must wait, wait: . . . Was not it God speaking through you, telling you to wait so that you could take this girl with you? Would Moses have left one Christian, even in Pharaoh's palace? Shame on you, John, if you do not take her!"

Fox glared at him, so amazed at this attack that he could not breathe for the moment.

"Did I say that I would leave her?" he cried. "What nation is she?"

Again, Francis hung his head as he whispered: "Michael did not tell me."

"You dare upbraid me, boy?" cried Fox, leaping to his feet. "Here I came with disgust in my heart to see a sinful soul and now the sinner dares take up a stone to throw at me!"

"Yea," said Francis, glad to see Fox stirred out of his complacent calm, to see the judge quiver, raging, to hear himself accused. "For once," he said, "I dare instruct John Fox in his Christian duty when he reneges. I am sinful, John: may God forgive me! I alone know the stink of the slime in me, but I have suffered for it. I have lived fifty, nay! one hundred years in that one night, being certain I would die in a heathen place with only damned Ottomites to hear my prayers. But there, in the very midst of those Ottomites, God sent friends to me. He did not desert me, He did not cast me off, as you would cast me off, John Fox. Any by that God we both adore, I swear I'll die rather than let those Christians who saved me rot in that unholy place that is but to a dungeon to them! Yea, throw me aside, John Fox. I will return to my friends who befriended me, if only that I might die with them."

"You would instruct me?" said Fox, walking on tiptoe, crouching, and thrusting out his beard at Francis. "You would tell me what to do?"

"He ees young," said Peter.

Then suddenly Fox laughed. He put both hands on Francis's shoulders and he laughed. "Young!" he cried, "yet he has been tested in a fiery crucible. To teach me the way to go! This is good, Peter, that youth should crow at us, eh?"

"You . . . you are not angry with me?" stuttered Francis, not daring to believe he was forgiven.

"Nay, lad! I did but rake you with a little fire to see if you were sound at bottom. . . . That you would instruct me on God's business! It is passing rare, eh, Pete?"

Sobbing, Francis clasped him in his arms and kissed his hairy cheek.

"Lad, lad," said Fox, half-laughing, "weep! for tears wash sin and rage away. Weep, for tears are cleansing to the soul and sign that God loves you. The wicked can never cry. I made pretence of anger for your sake. Stand up, my boy! See! I am not angry with you now. . . . Peter, dear! get us some Christian wine and we will sit and plot how best to do God's handiwork."

"You will save them?" cried Francis.

"I leave no Christian in Alexandria," said Fox.

They sat down on Peter's divan with a great pot of Christian wine before them and they drank deep and were right merry together. Yea, they laughed and jested, being strong in love of God, drinking in that heathen city while they plotted how to steal two Christians from the bey's sacred seraglio. Then said Fox, wringing the wine from his beard where he had dribbled:

"We meet to-night. 'Tis the last day of December. What month of better omen than the month of our Lord's birthday? He brought peace to the world this month, fifteen hundred and seventy-seven years agone, and now will He help us in our holy enterprise. We make for Gibraltar, "tis the nearest port, but that rests with the winds and the tides. Mayhap we go to Venice."

"A Roman port," said Francis.

"But a Christian one, and Peter can gab their lingo. I have the files—or rather, Peter has them—and to-day I take them to the bagnio. Will Wickney waits with Rob Moore and Crouch. We shall rasp off our shackles and, heigh-ho! for freedom! By eight of the clock each man shall be quit of his irons. I have such joy in me now to think it is so close!"

"What of the guards, John?"

"I have all plotted, never fear. We meet here at Peter's, just myself and Will and Rob and Crouch and two or three more I can trust, and Peter is going to call the Master of the Roads. You know the rat!" The joy fled Fox's eyes and they were like glass as he stared into his cup. "He spurned me when I pleaded for Christian burial for that poor lad. Yea, that boy whom he killed with his vile lusts. I swore then that I would take my vengeance, that God was wroth to see such sin, even in heathens. Peter will call the beast but I will deal with him." He took a deep breath and smiled. "I could not leave this hell-house," he said, "until I'd pulled that rascal's beard."

"He is too vile," said Francis, "for too quick a death."

"The quicker to send him into hell," said Fox. "I'd not give him time even to pray to his devils, for prayers to Satan mayhap bring peace to Satan's minions. I will cleave him to the midriff with one blow, as Samson dealt the Philistines. Yes, with the jaw-bone of an ass alone could I sever his heart and body, with the love of God."

"And when you have slain the keeper?" asked Francis.

"Then to the battle, lad! Yea, kill to the glory of God! My muscles are like iron at the goodly thought. The keys are in the jailer's lodge and we'll soon have them to free our brothers. Then to a galley. Each man shall know his task so that there'll be no confusion—one for the tackling, one for the victuals, some for munitions, some for oars, some for the sails, some for one thing, some for another. I have each man marked in my mind and he shall know his task before we free him. By morning, lads, we'll be at sea, in God's own sea!"

It seemed so casual an adventure when John Fox spoke of it. You forgot that you were a slave in a camp of armed men; you felt as the Israelites must have felt when Moses swore to lead them out of bondage with no weapon save skill at magic. "I will stretch out My hand," God had told Moses, "and shall smite Egypt with all My wonders. . . ." Like Moses, John Fox did not doubt and his assurance stifled doubt in others. It seemed like blasphemy to question a man so certain of God's grace.

"What weapons have we?" asked Francis.

"You have your knife," smiled Fox, "a noble cutting acquisition to our small munitions; although the blade be half-broken, it is yet sharp. We have spits and glaives and our chains to fight with. As for me . . ." He went to Peter's oven and from behind it drew out an ancient sword which he upheld with pride, gloating on it as though it were freshly tempered from the Tower of London. Yet it was a rusty weapon with silver lights glinting through the crust of brown when he whirled it. The blade had worked free of the grip, losing quillons and pommel, so Fox had bent down the narrow top of the blade in a curve to shield his hand.

"This will serve my turn," said he, and grinned. "Yea, and the turn of the Master of the Roads if I get him, as please God I will, within cutting-space."

Gently, as though it were fragile, he slid the sword back behind the stove. So poor a weapon on which so notable a deed was to depend! Francis set his lips as he remembered the cannon, the guns, the spears and the swords of the Turks. With that one ancient sword, his own broken knife, and their chains, the prisoners thought to storm a garrison and steal a boat! It was madness, yet better was it to die in the attempt than to remain ever a slave in these heathen hands.

"And we will have your janissary comrade," said Fox. "He'll be well weaponed, armed by Satan for Satan's own destruction."

Francis shifted from Fox's smile for he had only mentioned Michael as screen for Bessy. He doubted if Michael, for all his skin of Christianity, would fight with them against his Turkish comrades. Nor did he wish the fellow with them, and would try to slip from him to-night, for Michael's faith was in Bessy, not in

God, and should Bessy betray him, fleeing with Francis, would Michael's faith survive? Francis thought not, yet he forced a smile, seeing how narrowly Fox watched him.

"Yea," he said, licking his lips, "he'll be well-weaponed."

"Then there's the wench," said Fox. "She will be little help. . . . Does she know English, boy?"

"A . . . a little. . . ."

"What land is she from? Greece? Hungary? Italy? Serbia? Bulgaria? Where?"

"I know not," said Francis, "I only know that she is Christian."

"Well, she is your risk," said Fox, and Francis grew afraid. Fox was now so quiet while his eyes glittered with questions. Sickishly, Francis smiled at him, for he felt suddenly certain that Fox knew the truth. But it was only a moment's fear, for Fox called for further wine, saying they must drink to God and damnation to their enemies, and Bessy was forgotten. They could think of little else but the adventure ahead. No matter what they spoke of, within a minute their tongues were back, wagging over every detail of the plot; and they could not keep still, striding the room, drinking and grinning.

"We start at eight," said Fox. "Remember. If you are not here we cannot wait for you. To alter the timing would be to throw everything out of gear. The moment the damned Master of the Roads falls dead, and he'll fall yarely, we must be in the streets, into the bagnio and the shipyards. If you dawdle, lad, we cannot pause to wait for you."

"I will be back," said Francis.

"Are you sure you'll not get lost? are you certain of the aqueduct back to the palace?"

"Yea," said Francis, "I left my sleeve on its side. Only I fear to lose my way here. You must lower a lanthorn and a rope."

"*Si*," said Peter, "you will haff theem."

A last drink, then Fox stood to his feet.

"I have my barbering to do," he said. "Would I could cut their throats as a farewell, but 'twould be foolish not to work. I do not want them seeking me and mayhap punishing me when there is God's work to be done this night. They are smooth as squid, the dogs, all the flesh of them, but their chin-beards. It was some damned law of that Mohammed fellow who thought to better God's handiwork by cutting off the hair. You'd think they'd need hair in this heat, for hair stops chafing of the skin. I wonder their armpits are not raw. But then, they never work and so they never sweat. Yet they take five baths a day, 'tis monstrous wicked! five times a day they scrub God's sculpture, for their Prophet told them to. Even the women shave. Yea, but for their heads, they are as smooth as the men. Like worms," said Fox: "so we will stamp on them."

He took Francis in his arms and kissed him and it was painful for Francis to meet his look, knowing how he had lied about Bessy.

"God be with you, boy," said Fox. "Till eight."

"Till eight," said Francis, kissing him.

Till eight. . . . The accursed sun, it seemed, did not move. It was glued whitely, blindingly, on the pale sky of winter, and Francis cursed it as he watched the shadows of the lattice on the floor grow longer. The need for action fretted him and he could not remain still, yet he dared not leave this room. Peering through the slit of a window he saw janissaries pass in the street, treading ponderously in heavy shoes, plumes brushing against his window—so close he could have touched them—and the pointed spears of office raised blazing in the sunlight; he felt his heart quicken while he gripped his knife lest they seek him here. But they did not enter.

It was thought he had either reached the desert or been drowned in the aqueducts, Peter told him; the house-to-house search was over and the bey was busy flogging his guard for letting him escape. In the afternoon parties were to be sent farther afield.

"I feel," said Francis, "that John knew who Bessy was. The way he looked when I mentioned her, as if he read my heart and knew I lied."

But Peter smiled and shook his head.

"Not Juan," he said; "he would keel her ef he knew."

"And to-night . . . he might kill her then?"

"He weel be too busy keeling heathens," said Peter. "Haff no fear. He weel not see her in night time. . . . I am a ole man now, but I luff once. *Sí.* I cannot help theenk sometime, what she look like, that weench I leaf in the family way in Avila. I never see my bambino; sailormen are that way, are they not, Francesco? She was . . . what was her name? Neffah mind. I luffed her. I kees and greep her to me and she say she haff child. I say, I marry you when I haff money. I nevah haff money. I nevah come back. *Sí,* luf ees wonderful!"

"Yea, very wonderful," said Francis. Wonderful to have lived in him all these years and he not to have known of it . . . but, he wondered, had Bessy stayed in England, had he watched her grow to womanhood, would his love have grown with her flesh or would the boy have forgotten her in other loves? was it the strangeness of their meeting that had broken the years and made them children again? He did not know nor care. He only knew that it was almost a painful pleasure to brood on her and agony to think of that swine of a bey, of her in men's breeches in a heathen harem. . . .

He could not sit still, so slow was the sun in going when there was so much to do in darkness—Bessy to be rescued, Michael to be calmed or killed, the guard to be fought and the ships to be captured. . . . And if Bessy did not come . . . There had been that sudden fall

of the plaque last night as if she had been seen talking to him. Nay, nay, if she had been caught the bey would have slain her, the tidings would have reached Peter who knew the city's gossip . . . and if they had caught her they would have sought for him. No, Bessy was safe, she would keep her word. Then he went suddenly cold to remember he had given her no exact time of meeting, himself not knowing when Fox intended to escape, and she most certainly would not come to him until the other women slept!

His horror was such that almost he ran out of the house to go to Bessy. My God, they would be too late. . . . Fox would have sailed long before she came to him. He had said that the prisoners must be free by eight, and at eight o'clock the harem would be yet astir, giving Bessy no chance to steal away. . . .

"Peter," he cried, "I must go back, I must get word to Bessy somehow. She doesn't know the time we leave."

"How weel you tell her?"

"I don't know," groaned Francis, "but I'm going back. I must."

"You cannot," said Peter.

"I will," said Francis. "Surely you have a hole to the waterways? You must . . . how the devil else do you water your wine?"

"*Sí*, I haff a hole but I neffah water my wine."

"You must take me to it. I'll get Michael. I know his room. You must, you must; otherwise you'll sail to-night without us. What's the good of my rescuing her merely for us to die together?"

Peter sighed. It was useless, he realised, to argue with a lover, for lovers were always mad. But were not madmen often the voices of God? Even the Moslems listened in reverence when a madman spoke, and mayhap God spoke through this lad. Certainly he had God's shadow on him, to have escaped so many perils.

"Come," he said.

The hole was in the kitchen floor and Peter tied a rope to his oven, then tossed the rope down. The oven was clamped to the wall and could not give. He took a small blue jug, well stoppered it and knotted twine about its neck, then he slipped the loop on to Francis's shoulders.

"Eet ees cognac," said he. "Eet will warm you. . . . Let me kees your forehead, *Francesco mio*."

Awkwardly, Francis bowed his head and let his friend kiss his forehead, then Peter put both arms around him and kissed his mouth.

"God be with you," he said. "*Adios, adios*. . . ."

"*Adios*," said Francis and caught the rope and swung into the dark.

CHAPTER XII

TO-NIGHT. . . .

FRANCIS looked about him amongst the pillars and arches and troughs. Light came from many wells, so that here, under the city, it was not so dark as under the palace. He stumbled over the rubbish that had been thrown down—decaying food and human ordure and broken pots and old rags. Around him the water bubbled when it caught on some obstruction, some fallen masonry or refuse out of houses. At last, he found his sleeve where he had left it, held down by the stone, and climbed up swiftly. He set his teeth against the cold and dived, then swum under the arch. The distance was but small, he discovered to his surprise, for now he did not swim into the unknown and had not the same terrors that before had lengthened time.

Out of the tunnel and under the palace again, he scrambled out and took a long swig of the brandy, then gazed about him, seeking Michael's plaque. With horror he stared up at plaque after plaque and dizzied himself trying to remember where exactly he had stood last night, then with a gulp of relief he noticed the burned-out lanthorn. That had stood under Michael's plaque. The rogue had forgotten to take it with him, thank the Lord. . . .

Francis leaped on to the aqueduct and tried to reach the plaque, but could not, so he took stones and tossed them up, hoping that Michael might hear; but there came no answer, only the rattle of stone after stone, and he shivered as minutes passed and Michael did not answer. He was not there, was probably on duty. Francis let the stones fall and stood and peered into the darkness. What could he use to stand on that he might reach up to there? But all was dark save for a few broken gaps in the walls and rays of light from carelessly replaced plaques.

He crawled from the aqueduct and stood listening to the far voices of the Turks. If he made any violent assault on that plaque, they would hear him, yet somehow he must reach Michael. . . . To have come all the way back only to find himself helpless, while above his head, there! from where she had spoken last night, Bessy was living at that moment! He spat with rage. Only that ceiling separated them. She might be standing that very moment right atop of his head. Right there. . . . The thought drove him demented, sent him stumbling through the dark, tumbling over debris, fouling his hands in muck when he fell and threw them forward to break the impact. If he were only two feet taller . . . yea, only two feet. . . . There must be something here that was two

feet high, some stones, wood, anything; but it was too dark to find anything, and at last, gasping and sweating and close to tears, he sat near the bushes by some sunlight, where he had sat yesterday to listen to the passers-by.

He lay and took deep breaths and tried to stop his legs from trembling. Let him think quietly! he must not have panic driving him to make some stupid sound that would be overheard. . . . What would Fox have done had he been here? Yea, that was the way to think. . . . Fox would most certainly have prayed; so Francis prayed, but he could not concentrate on God while all the time he pictured Bessy above him chattering with other women in the harem and not knowing that he waited.

Dear God, he whispered, give him some sign, some spiritual fingerpost to reaching Michael. . . .

He must collect stones, pile up stones. . . . But two feet of differently shaped stones would not balance long enough, he found, for him to reach that plaque. Flat stones, if he could get enough flat stones . . .

With renewed energy, he went quietly to work, walking on all fours like an animal, fumbling in the dark about his feet, until he had gathered many stones; but when he placed them one atop the other on the aqueduct they always toppled down after he put his weight on them. Yet patiently he continued, discarding those that were not sufficiently flat, building through the hours like a beaver at a dam, digging rocks out of the mud, dislodging them from damp walls.

The janissaries were singing. That was their war song with its continual howl of *Allah il-Allah*. Francis had heard it often and the words had once been explained to him. It was all about yelling until you cracked the sky and about the joys of massacring Christians, about the triumphant moon of Islam snapping the Cross, about the glorious noises of cymbals, of bowstrings and of scimitars clashing together, with armour clanging. No woman, they howled, could ever weaken them; they fought for booty, fire and slaughter in obedience to the Prophet and the sultan and they hoped, they sang, to wake up in the arms of some particularly libidinous houri in paradise. *Allah il-Allah! Allah il-Allah!*

And il-Allah to you! muttered Francis, grimacing up at the noise. He'd like to have had a boatload of Hawkins's lads. They'd have il-Allahed them mighty soon, by God! . . . But he had no boatload of Hawkins's lads. He was alone, grovelling in mud, laboriously building brick on brick on the edge of the aqueduct. He felt the bricks to see if they were firm, then carefully stood on them.

Not quite high enough, just half a dozen more. . . . But half a dozen bricks or flat stones were not easily found, and but for the fiery drink Peter had given him, Francis would scarcely have had the strength to continue, for his back ached from continual bending and, when he stood erect, he almost fell with dizziness.

But at last, at last, when he stood on his little heap, he touched the plaque, pushed it, and it slid from its grooves. His fingers could just reach these grooves and he took a deep breath when he clutched the side, tightening his muscles as he sprang. He was weak, and when he swayed half-in, half-out the hole, he feared his arms would not have the strength to haul up his legs, but slowly, groaning and sobbing through clenched teeth, he wriggled up and lay on the floor and looked about him.

It was Michael's cell. His terror lest he had chosen the wrong chamber was gone. He shut his eyes and lay gasping and coughing, unable for the moment even to slide the plaque back into place, and it was with a great effort that he unstoppered the cognac and let a little dribble down his throat.

When at last he was able to stand and look carefully about him, he saw to his delight that Michael had left his staff behind him. Francis took it and tossed it on his palm. It balanced beautifully. This was the janissary's symbol of authority, like a constable's wand; it was six feet in length and had a silver tip at one end, with which the janissary thrashed his way through crowds or broke the skulls of evil-doers. As Francis tossed it and caught it, happy like any warrior testing a weapon, the door opened and he sprang round, ready to fight.

Michael gaped at him, then hurriedly shut and barred the door and placed his back against it. The long plume swept over one shoulder and down his chest like the tail of a pet, and in his hands he gripped his matchlock. Slowly he cocked it, click-click-click, but Francis was not afraid, for the slowmatch curled round his left wrist was unlighted and therefore he could not fire the powder pressed in the pan. The gun was useless save as a club, but the sword hung in its curved sheath, a far more dangerous weapon than this flimsy rod. The grip curved contrarywise to the curve of the blade, curving down to make a rest for his resting palm; the quillons were straight under the grip, but were pointed down at either end and in the centre where they slid over the sheath which hung from two straps, its point behind his calf. Michael was in full dress, perhaps having just come from parade, his coat buttoned tightly to the high collar, drawn back from under the belt and clipped behind to show the hem of the undercoat and the legs in loose hose. Jewels glittered on the sheath that held the plumes to the hat, and the holy sleeve fell from behind, like the French hood of an Englishwoman.

"So you have come back?" said Michael at last. "I thought you dead by now. Why did you come back?"

"You heard me promise Bessy."

"You have come back for her?"

"Yea," said Francis, gripping the tall rod while he watched the man narrowly.

"Where were you hiding? We have searched everywhere, each inch of Alexandria. Where were you?"

"I cannot tell you without betraying friends."

"What friends have you—a slave?"

"Friends sufficient to hide me from the soldiers of Islam." Francis stared unblinkingly, almost haughtily at him as Michael pressed against the door, the matchlock-butt between his feet while he fingered the ramrod, running it up and down in quick jerks as if undecided whether to load the weapon for execution. "For I have the true God as protector," said Francis, trying to speak with the assurance of Fox, but it was only in words he felt in God's presence, not in his heart. "And against the true God all might of Islam is but a featherweight. . . . I must see Bessy."

"Impossible. . . ." Michael spoke slowly, then said sharply: "Put down that baton!"

"If you put down that gun and sword."

"I take no orders in my home," said Michael, widening his eyelids and straightening his shoulders. "Put down that baton or I kill you."

Francis hesitated, then threw the baton down. It was a useless weapon against the edge of that sword, one blow would slice it in halves, yet he felt naked when he let it go and had naught but his hands and a broken knife for fighting. But it were best to try to conciliate the man, not to anger him with threats, particularly when threats could never be enforced.

"I am helpless now," he said, arms loose at his sides. "Again my, life is in your hands. I place it there trustfully, in the dear name of Christ."

Michael relaxed a little, let his shoulders sag, but he did not put down the gun. He said: "They are seeking you now. The city is being searched again, the *sulaks* have unstrung their bows as they watch, the *tufankis* keep their matches lighted, their guns charged, the camelry scour the desert, while you hide here in my chamber in the very palace of the bey. You will have me doomed yet. The bey has sworn by the Prophet that he will knot your bowels and give your heart for birds to peck; that you should look upon his harem is a crime that blood cannot wash away. You will suffer like the damned passing hell's seven doors, each door opening on greater hell, when he catches you. And now he makes his servants suffer for your sin. There is wailing in the palace and bodies are whipped and tortured because you would look on women's faces. He dares not touch us janissaries, he knows our strength and he trembles before us, but the others sweat for your sin, yea, for your sin."

"What are these others to you?"

"Far more than you are to me; some are my comrades." The pale eyes darkened, seemed to concentrate on a pin-point of light in the midst of each pupil, and the mouth tightened. "And now you

rashly return. Did God send you back that you might suffer for your sins, bringing release to the innocent?"

His fingers trembled on the gun as his eyes widened. There was no mistaking the hatred in that voice, even though it was pitched down, and he talking quietly as if discussing unimportant matters. Yet the eyes were aflame with icy light and the dark brows were straight.

"You cannot kill your guest," said Francis, trying to stop the shivering of his flesh and speaking boldly. "Particularly one who worships the one God."

"I cannot kill you while you are here, for that is the law of Islam," said Michael, sighing; "for a guest is sacred and hospitality is sweet in the nostrils of God. I cannot kill you here, no, but outside that door is not here, in the aqueducts is not here. Out of this chamber you leave my hospitality and seek the bey's. He has no weakness for Christians who peep upon his women."

"Have you forgotten God? To kill is to break most holy commandments."

"I begin to doubt that God," said Michael. "Sometimes I think there is more truth in the words of the Prophet Mohammed than in those of the Prophet Jesus. He promises us a merrier heaven, too. . . . But let's not argue on religion for we are ignorant. Let us argue as men."

"Willingly," said Francis.

"And in man's words, you have returned to steal the sultana?"

"Yea."

"And you expect my help?"

"Yea."

"Then, indeed," laughed Michael, "you are mad."

He laughed suddenly, like a girl, giggling, and in that giggle there seemed to Francis more menace than there would have been in any deep masculine bay. It was the eunuch in Michael gloating on the defeat of a man; although he was no eunuch in flesh, his soul was castrated like a monk's, knowing naught of passion save in the hurtful poignancy of dreams. And now the dreamer saw male potency helpless before him and he laughed like a priest of Isis sharpening the knife. It was strange to hear that bubbling sound of childish glee from under the thick moustachios, and very frightening.

Then Michael turned abruptly, as if laughter had weakened him, and sat on the low bed, the matchlock between his knees, and smiled up at Francis.

"Listen, fool," he said. "Yesterday I had a devil in me. I knew not what I did. I did but suffer. Now I have awoken and like one after a nightmare I look back and wonder if it was I, I who lived that hell, who did those stupid things. This woman has been my secret and I unlocked that secret to you because for so long had I heard her gab your name. All the more reason, one would say, to kill you, a rival, but I do not lust after her. I worshipped her,

for I have tamed the flesh and am its master. And I remembered how the Christ told us to forgive our enemies, and I was weak. I thought to bring you face to face so that she might see the face she thought she loved and be ashamed. But memory proved a strong liar in her heart and the foolish creature put out her hand to you. I have never kissed her hand."

He glared up with sudden passion and his hands trembled on the gun. There were unshed tears in his eyes as he cried:

"But you, you would have looked upon her face!"

Francis dared not speak, knowing that any unwary word might kindle the rascal's rage to action. Therefore he remained silent, frowning while he wondered how he could ever possibly spur this madman to bring Bessy to him.

"Is nothing sacred in England?" cried Michael; "are men like beasts that they let their women roam the streets unveiled? Mohammed would not have them even worship in mosques lest they lead men to wickedness. Yet you think naught of breathing in each other's nostrils and seeing and touching naked mouths. I had not realised how strong was this sin amongst Christians until, last night, I saw you reach to pluck her yashmak, and she, so lost to modesty, she would have withdrawn that yashmak of her own sinful will!"

He rubbed his hand on his forehead that was gleaming with sweat. There was agony in his voice as he spoke of Bessy unveiled as a Christian might speak of a woman without her kirtle. Yea, to these Moslems, it seemed that the face was as sacred as the thighs, and Francis was exasperated by the nonsense. He could not understand such feelings and therefore dismissed as madness this worship of noses, mouths and chins.

"In England all women go unveiled," he said.

"Then is England accursed in its immodesty!" cried Michael, shuddering.

"Not only in England, but in Spain and France and Italy and Germany; yea, in all Christian countries, in the North and amongst the Flems, no woman veils her face. It is a custom only amongst Moslems."

"A most holy custom;" said Michael, "for a woman is a treasure given to man and her he must guard, or her sins will be upon his soul."

Francis groaned. Useless this argument, this running parallel on different faiths, leading them far from Bessy and the problem of getting her out of the harem.

"If you were a true lover," he said, "you would obey your lady. You would think it rightful to suffer in your lady's cause. You would sacrifice yourself for her."

"That is the talk of the Franks and I know not if I be a Frank. I am not certain if I be a Christian. Ah, God, whichever God You

be! pity your child! I have been told so much that my poor head aches between truth and truth. I but know that I worship the sultana and that therefore, fool, I hate you."

"I have been told," said Francis, warily watching those hands on the gun, "that it is sacred law in the East that even should a man slay your brother and ravish your wife, should he come to your home, even with bloody hands, you must set food before him and treat him with love because he is your guest. Is that not so?"

"Yea, but I am neither East nor West. I am a cockatrice born of a rooster's egg. I was most happy till you came."

"You are English-born," said Francis, thinking he saw him weaken. "I too am English, Bessy is English. That blood should prove a link against the Turk. To-night I must save Bessy, body and soul of her I must save."

"How?"

"I cannot tell you in your present humour, but if you will only bring me to her, I can save her, and you as well. All three of us will step in England within a week or so."

"What should I do in England?"

"What you do here. England has soldiers, too."

"While you have Bessy?"

"That is for Bessy to say."

Michael stared dully at him, speaking automatically as if his mind were not on his tongue but plotting elsewhere. Now suddenly he grinned and lolled on the pallet and tried to appear friendly.

"Tell me," he said, "about this plot of yours. I will help if I can. Forget my talk, remember I am jealous. . . . Come, tell me, you who had chains until I gave you a file to rid yourself of them, how would you sail to England without a boat?"

That was what Francis could not tell. He could risk his own life but not the freedom of his fellows. He did not trust this sudden friendliness, for there was cunning in that smile, and hatred; at a hint of the truth, the rogue might blab to the bey. He was a janissary, most fanatical of warriors, and had himself confessed that Christ was going from his heart with loss of faith in Bessy. Most likely he wished to learn his plans only that he might betray them.

"I have a boat hidden," said Francis. "That is where I have been. To see if it was snug. And it is there where I hid it, on the coast, with victuals enough to sail to France or Italy. That is why I must see Bessy."

"But last night you arranged to meet her."

"Yea, but I would meet her earlier. There is a comrade to go with me, the boat is his, and he will not wait. Michael, for the love of God, you must help. You love Bessy. What consolation for you if she should hate you?"

"The consolation that you will never get her." He sat silent, smiling at Francis. "This seems madness to me," he said. "I'd

not believe one word had you not been hidden all day. You know more than you tell me. We went into the aqueducts this morning and I was certain you would be there, I loosened my sword so that I might run in to kill you before you could betray me, but you were not there. It is therefore plain that you have friends and this talk of yours might have some truth in it. Tell me all."

"I have told you all."

"No," said Michael, "you have not told me all. Where have you been lurking all day?"

"With my friend, I tell you. We went out in the boat, into the sea, and he would have sailed off then, but I made him come back, I could not go without Bessy."

"You were out at sea?" Yea, that was possible. They had not thought to search the sea. "Even if you have this boat," he said, "you have not got it now. There'll be not an inch of the coast that will not have been searched by sunset. This boat will be found."

"Not where my friend had hidden it."

"Nay? and if it be found and you take the sultana with you to-night and find it gone, what would you do?"

"I would trust in God," said Francis.

Michael shook his head. "It is foolish, my friend," he said. "I can but pity you, you are so mad. What is that bottle you have there?"

"Cognac," said Francis, passing it to him.

"Where got you this?" asked Michael. "Nay, I will not ask, I will but drink. . . . Yea, it is good. Glad am I that I be but half a Moslem. It is very good." He grinned at Francis, screwing up one eye while he calculated how best to kill him. Not here . . . apart from a guest being sacred, it would be difficult to explain a corpse in this chamber. Nay, elsewhere . . . the fool to have come back! "I will tell the sultana," he said. "What do you want her to know?"

But Francis saw the cruel flicker in those pale eyes and held his tongue. Yet somehow he must tell Bessy.

"Will you take her a note?" he asked.

"So you do not trust me? you will not tell me by your mouth this wonderful thing. But I will do it. We may as well all be mad together. Write it and I will take it. But I have nothing to write with."

There was naught to write with nor on in that chamber—no ink, no paper—but Francis plucked the wick from the lamp and crumbled the black, then wetted it with spittle.

"No paper?" he asked.

"No paper."

He had no longer even a shirt to tear and his breeches were too coarse for writing on.

"Here," said Michael, ripping the corner from the bedsheet.

"Thank you. It will do. . . ." But what to write? Could the rogue read English? Francis doubted it, and he had no other alternative but to trust him. There was naught else he could do, no other way of reaching Bessy. So, sighing, he wrote *seven tonite* on the cloth, using a splinter for pen, and pressed the lampblack in. It was faint, yet readable.

"There," he said.

"Pest!" cried the janissary, "that I cannot read!" He folded the cloth and put it carefully inside his coat. "Now get you down below and wait," he said. "I will deliver this."

"You will not betray us?" cried Francis.

"Get you down," said Michael.

He smiled as Francis crawled into the hole and hung by his fingers before dropping. Michael pushed forward his foot, raised the iron sole, then swiftly drew it back. Nay, to crush his fingers would be too small a pleasure; the fool must suffer subtler torments than that: suspense, despair and the knowledge of being tricked . . . there was no torture greater than suspense, as Michael knew. Let him rot amongst the aqueducts, waiting, waiting; and meanwhile he would take a troop along the coast and find that boat. Yea. . . . He looked on the cloth that Francis had given him, drawing it from inside his coat, then he rolled it up, clenched his fist and laid it on top of his fist. Then he spang it up with his thumb-nail and let it lie where it fell.

Whistling, he took his sword and, whistling, slowly cleaned it, as if preparing for a holy war. There might be a Christian guarding that boat when he went searching for her.

Soldiers were marching from the palace, searching, searching. The bey was blue with rage. For infidels to leer into his harem . . . ! And he chewed his beard to think that one had been so easily slain instead of having been slowly tortured as he deserved. But the other must not escape. Every inch of the desert would be searched, every grain of sand up-ended, and the dog would yet be found. The bey dared not squander his rage on the janissaries, although them he blamed for not having remained on guard while the infidels had carpentered, so he turned on his slaves and courtiers. He slew many of them, those he disliked the most, by what he called "tossing." His favourite executioner, a shining negro, would pick up the condemned and would toss him in the air. So expert was he, so long practised at the art, that at a twist of his wrist he could break a man's neck with the fall, could stun him, or merely dislocate a muscle or two. Already to-day had he broken five necks, strained over thirty muscles and stunned ten poor wretches.

But the bey desired blood, blood of the infidel. . . . He would lean his narrow white-bearded head on its thin neck to listen as courtiers came hurrying with fresh hopes, but never with any news.

The catacombs had been searched, the dust swept up, not even a reptile could live there now unnoticed; but the Christian had not been found. Riders patrolled the desert, some on swift horses, some on lurching camelback; but the Christian had not been found.

"He must be found!" shrieked the bey.

More soldiers charged from the palace, armies charged over the country-side, to the very banks of the Nile they cuffed the peasants and robbed them of the little they had as some recompense for this distasteful exercise. Then on they rode to other villages, robbing, cursing, sweating in the winter sun, although a cold wind blew and tossed sand in their eyes. They rested by oases, those patches of water spat out of heaven by friendly angels, but never a footprint of the infidel could they find. Only the prints of the wind showed in that world of sand peopled by the children of Ishamel and Lilith, that first wife of Adam. No sign anywhere of the infidel. . . .

Into the bagnios tramped the janissaries, kicking and hitting the slaves to force them to confess where they had hidden the fugitive. They went amongst them where they worked, with threats of torture. They came to Gabriel Crouch and gladdened his heart with the tidings that Francis was as yet uncaught. He was at mortar-making, stamping a mixture of lime and sand in a long hollowed trunk of a tree, hitting it with a great mallet. One mad-eyed janissary kicked him in the belly with his iron shoe, yelling at him to tell where his dog of a friend lay hidden. Mumbling in lingua franca, Crouch swore that he did not know.

"Don't lie, old man so near the grave!" cried the janissary, churning his heel into his belly.

"A Christian does not lie," said Crouch.

"You lie in saying you do not lie." He kicked Crouch's mouth and turned to the other slaves who watched, raging.

"I have not seen the lad, thank God," said Bob Moore.

"I pray for him," said Will Wickney.

On swept the janissaries, over the desert, through villages, riding down those too slow to leap from their horses' painted hoofs. Men fled and hid at sight of their hairless chins and brave moustachios; they hid in cellars, on roofs, knowing that these warriors were the true rulers of Islam and that they swore by death, rapine and blood-money. Blue coats buttoned tight, the tails buttoned back, bows and guns on their shoulders, high hats bursting into gorgeous plumage, the janissaries raced like lawful bandits through the land.

They caught up women by the hair, ripping aside the veil. "This mongrel-bitch knows more than her mouth utters: bastinado her that she may talk." Seizing old men from the fields: "You have hidden the pig-eater: prick him with swords, comrades!"

Furious at having to work in this sandy wind, they clashed their swords on sheaths to frighten cowards, they twirled their moustachios,

and kicked the feeble from their way. Allah il-Allah! why should they ride or march for a pig of a slave? Allah il-Allah! out of our way, pig-dogs! Who dares withstand the bey's army, the men of the sultan? who'd raise a whisper against those iron-shod warriors perfumed from the seraglio, stuffed with meat and rice and vine-leaves? None dared withstand them as they sang their battlecry of death and the glories of paradise. Even the bey, even the sultan, feared them when they up-ended stew-pots and drummed rebellion, for these janissaries did not fear to die; the faithful of Allah should wish to die. Had not the Prophet promised—all sins would be forgiven those who died fighting for the faith? they would be carried swiftly up to paradise to taste perpetual pleasures in the limp arms of black-haired houris with flesh like musk. When they died, warriors would be given each five hundred houris, lovelier than a boy's dream of love; yea, five hundred houris each and also four thousand virgins—all guaranteed by Allah—for relish when one, if one, grew satiated with houris' skill.

And the Christian slaves, cringing from them, even under the whip were glad to think that Francis was not caught. One of their brothers had shed his chains and may God go with him! At his mortar-tub, Crouch spat when the warriors passed, and he smiled to see that Francis was not roped, dragged at the horses' hoofs behind them. Under the wintry sunlight he toiled with his mates, while others pulled great stones overland and others drove wagons yoked to six bulls and two horses. Slaves were at all the menial tasks while the Turks dozed in the shade. Mostly they were at building, sawing wood, smoothing it with the adze, raising pillars, moulding bricks, or they were making gunpowder or casting cannon and small arms, or grooming the palace horses, sweeping the stables, grinding at hand-mills. They could not pause even to eat without a bull's pizzle whizzing on their shoulders, so that they worked with one hand and stuffed their mouths with the other. Some of the older trusted prisoners hobbled in their irons through the streets, peddling toys, pieces of embroidery, models of ships, knitted gloves or stockings. Others traded sherbet from Peter's and other stores, with bottles of stronger liquor hidden amongst sherbet-bottles.

But this day, the slaves sang and worked with merrier zest than usual, for last night the whisper had come: *Escape.* None knew from whence that whisper had first come, it was as if each man had read it in the others' eyes. But somehow they had known; their spirits had sniffed for freedom, for escape, for off with the shackles. . . . Francis had led the way and they would follow him. . . . Then Fox had spoken and the whisper had become the word: They would be free that night.

Openly, Fox went from house to house; only the thin fetters on his ankles marked him as a slave, for he was as bearded as a Turk, and was beloved by most of them for his merry chatter and his gentle

hands. He could shave heads as clean as a baby's bottom. Always smiling, ready to listen to the longest tale, he was trusted, for he never stole so much as a bite of food, although a Nazareeno. This day was he particularly affable and his customers laughed with him, all save the renegados, for to them he would not speak, not even on this day with its tang of coming freedom. They were traitors to God, the vilest of reptiles, and his fingers throbbed when he touched their scalps while his razor seemed to tug his palm to cut their throats. Even the Turks distrusted these renegados and would not let them marry a good Mohammedan lass, but forced them to take negresses and half-castes. They were given no responsible tasks, save to captain galleys, for Christians were commonly better seamen than the Turks. Isolated, abandoned of Christ and Mohammed, they lived separate from the true believers. These men did Fox hate and he regretted that he must sail to-night without first slaughtering them as a sacrifice to God for his adventure.

Slowly the evening came, evening of God's men's escape, and Fox sang while he watched the shadows lengthen. Muezzins were crying to their heathen Allah while he smiled in his beard and bowed his head as he prayed to Christ. He nodded to a slave leading a train of bulls and horses through the sand.

"At eight," he whispered: "have the fetters off."

The man's eyes flickered in a smile, but he did not answer. He staggered on with the bent back of the slave.

"At eight. . . ."

"The fetters off. . . ."

"At eight. . . ."

"He will call us. . . ."

"At eight. . . ."

To Crouch, the whisper:

"Frankie is safe. . . . At eight, the fetters off. . . ."

For years had Fox been brooding on this night. Not a Christian would be left, save the consuls, in this accursed city after eight of the clock. The galleys were all in, and the slaves on shore. Last night, in the bagnio, he had warned them. While the jailers slept, he had stolen with Wickney, Moore and Crouch and other trusted friends, rousing the slaves on their wooden pallets. They had awoken alertly, as is the way of slaves, dreading to anger their masters with a yawn or a dawdling stretch of arms. Within one minute they had been stark awake; at a whisper, a touch of the shoulder, the cobweb of dreams had been broken and they had looked warily into the dark. Fox had stood against the altar that some Spaniards had built and had starved themselves to save every kreutzer with which to buy cups and such so that they might worship God after their fashion, for there was one amongst them who had been a clerk and could say prayers in Latin. When the slaves had gaped about him, Fox had spoken to

them in the darkness, warning them to be silent and to conceal their joy when he told them that at last he had plotted their freedom. He asked naught from them, he had said, but that they stand ready to his call and act like true men, to the glory of God and the peril of the infidel. He would pluck from them their fetters, he had said, if they would but put their trust in him, after God, for he had files ready that they must use on their fetters on the morrow.

They had gaped at him to hear that the day's rumour was the truth, for the tidings were too glorious, too wondrous to be immediately believed. They had known that Fox was ever plotting but for so long had they acquiesced in slavery, twisting from hopes lest they prove liars, that they had not dared to have full faith in him. But now when he had spoken cheerfully as if their freedom were assured, they had tottered to their knees before him and had blessed him and thanked him as though he were God.

"To God," had he said, "send up your prayers. Not to me, fellows, for I am but a sinful man, like you."

So to God had they prayed while the clerk knelt at the altar and called on Him in reverent, if dog-, Latin, while Fox contemptuously had turned his back. His God had no ear for gibberish, he had said.

The sun was gone, bloody behind a screen of sand, blurred, amorphous: soon now would be time. There was only that foolish lad to come from the palace with the Christian wench and the janissary. They must take their desperate chance, small chance, thought Fox, for he could not delay for them. The plot was too carefully timed to falter with it now for the sake of three.

He slipped into Peter's wine-shop and in the distillery at the back he found friends waiting for him. There was William Wickney of Portsmouth, that lean godly man with a winking eye and a twisted countenance, the eye that did not wink being very stately in its glare as if ever reproving its lewd mate; there was Robert Moore of Harwich, skilful navigator who had made charts under the instruction of that wizard, Dr. Dee of Mortlake, he who had foretold the accession of Queen Elizabeth and whom she had consulted in his little home to find by the stars the most auspicious day for her crowning; there was Gabriel Crouch, more troubled about Francis's absence than the coming escape, he frowned, ever listening for a tap under the plaque that would tell them that Francis had returned; there was Peter the Spaniard; there was David Tipton of London who had sailed with Frobisher and who had a white gash on his cheek as proof of it; there was Richard Saltinstall of London, a man of much learning who talked like a parson and who had studied at Cambridge once; there was Andrew Perde, a boatswain from Bristol, so long a slave that he could talk like a Turk and had read the Koran and thought the book wise if sinful.

They sat on the floor with mugs of wine between their heels and each was braced for action; they smiled up at Fox when he entered.

"At eight," said Fox. "There has been no day to equal this since the Lord spoke to His children some years back in this same accursed Egypt. Yea, then did the Lord tell the fleeing Israelites that when their children should ask how came they out of bondage, they should reply: 'By strength of hand did the Lord lead us out of Egypt, from this detestable house of bondage.' So, too, shall we tell our children, God be thanked, how by God's hand we have 'scaped. You each know your tasks?"

"Yea," said they all, and drank.

"You, Peter must see to the Master of the Roads, for long have my bowels writhed at thought of his wickedness to God's poor sheep, in especial to that pretty lad what hanged himself. You will tell him that old Hamet ben Ali would speak with him and thus lure him from his guard of devils. Tell him that Ali has a pipe of right good Madeira ready for broaching; that will bring him, for the rogue cares no more for the edicts of Mohammed than for the holy word of Christ. Bring him here. I will be without and will deal with him, please the Lord." He smiled and sighed and his eyes were bright as a saint's a-gleam at thought of paradise. "Then will we go to the road and capture the garrison with the keys taken from the beast after I have used him as God thinks fit. Then to our friends, and from the bagnio to the galleys. You know which galley. She is that sweet vessel named the *Captain of Alexandria*. But first must we take the garrison and leave not a dog alive, so that we can adventure freely to the road where our galley is safely stowed. You, Wickney, will handle the galley, you will see that she is shipped and you will have forty godly men to aid you. You, Robin, will break the lockers for the sails; you, Peter, to the masts; you, David, to the stores, for we must not risk thirst or hunger; you, Richard, must stay on guard, to give warning if the devils rally. Take what stout fellows you wish. I will hold the rear."

"I cannot wait," grinned Wickney. "It seems I've swallowed a lizard that wriggles in my guts. I would be up and doing."

"For weapons," said Fox, "we must rely with God's help on what we find in the garrison. There is some sorry gear that Peter has gathered with much labour and no small risk, of which I take the sword, being your captain. Bring the treasures, Peter."

From a hole he had made at the back of the stove, Peter brought out the treasures: two iron spits, a small crowbar, a broken knife, and that old rusty gripless sword which was Fox's insignia of captain. He took it and lifted it, baring his teeth as he shook it in the dying sunlight, and the light rippled in and out amongst the rust. He felt the edge with his thumb, and smiled.

"It is bluntish," he said, "so the greater the hurt to the harbour-master. Long is it since I gripped a sword, even a rusty broken

sword, and thought to use it. It does my poor heart good to feel it chafe the palm."

Peter said: "Fransesco haf not come yet, nor his janissary, nor his weench."

Fox lowered the sword, and frowned. "A woman is no good omen for a fight," said he. "Francis must protect her, if he can; we cannot barter our freedom for a female's comfort. If she reaches our ship, Gabriel, being eldest, must tend her. It goes against my heart to waste time on a woman, but Francis swears that she has laboured much, plucking souls from the Prophet in the very heart of the harem. And I have sworn to leave no Christian in this sinful city. I do not want her with us, but should she come, we will protect her, if we can."

"I haf let down the lamp," said Peter, refilling Fox's cup. "Look! see eet ees bright, Jesu's lamp in heathen darkness, and here haf I placed a ladder for heem to climb on with the leetle one."

"It is well," said Fox, looking into the darkness, one hand on Peter's shoulder. "I am troubled, friends," he said; "the ordeal is too great for one lad, but he has chosen it, and we have each our task that is of greater importance than the saving of one woman, even a Christian woman, from the bey."

"He weel come," smiled Peter. "He ees young; he ees, as you say, bravo!"

"Yea, he is brave," said Fox, turning from the hole; "he is English. But we have greater things to plot than to worry about him. Gentlemen, let us drink damnation to the infidel and glory to God!"

They clinked their mugs and solemnly drank, Crouch muttering a particular prayer for Francis; being his father's comrade, he felt responsibility for the lad, and fearfully he looked down into the darkness and heard the water whisper and chuckle along the aqueducts. Peter had lighted a lamp and lowered it so that Francis should not lose his way, and next to it rested a ladder so that he could climb up easily, even if they had gone about their bloody business by the time he came. The lamp in that still air never swayed and its light seemed but to stain the darkness, not to pierce it.

Crouch whispered his prayer into the wine that was red like blood, dabbling his beard; blood so soon to be shed, Christian was well as Moslem blood, and he prayed that Francis's be not amongst it. For if it were, how could he look into the eyes of the lad's father when he entered heaven? That would be an awkward moment, thought Crouch with a shiver, and he swore that though himself should die, Francis must yet reach England.

CHAPTER XIII

THEFT OF A JEWEL

IT was so cold that Francis dared not remain still, for he was naked to the waist; yet he was tired, exhausted by waiting and worrying whether Michael had betrayed him. Light was dying in the crevices in the walls so that he knew that it must be late, but he had no way of gauging time. He had lost all count of it, for every second was to him almost a minute, and he shook to think that mayhap the escape had already begun. Nay, there would be cannon-fire, uproar in the palace, when the slaves rose. He could not fail to hear the noise, the calling of janissaries to arms, and he was tense, waiting in terror, for once the chains were off his friends he knew that he was doomed. He would never have time in which to reach the harbour before the ship was launched. There would be naught for him to do but to imbed the grip of his knife in the ground and to throw himself on the point. Better to slay himself quickly than to suffer the tricks of the Turks: they had so many tortures, from quick strangling with a bowstring to the terrible fall on knife upon knife down to the bottom of a tower. They would kill him slowly, he knew, for no Moslem could forgive strange eyes in his harem. Even though they mostly cared little for women, fondling catamites for preference, in the fashion of the East, nevertheless, in their great pride, they would seek vengeance on him as though he had committed blasphemy.

He listened until his eardrums hurt with the constant strain, for he had everything prepared for Bessy's coming. Stones had he carried from under Michael's plaque and had raised them near under the hole through which last night she had spoken; finding them not sufficient, for the ceiling here was higher, he spent hours gathering further stones and setting them straight on the edge of the aqueduct, until, when he stood upon them, he could finger the plaque beyond which she waited.

If Michael had not betrayed him she should have been here by now. The last of the sunlight was gone from the holes in the walls. All was dark and he dared not move far lest he become lost, but stood, shivering under the plaque, holding his breath to listen and hearing but the running of water and the scurry of reptiles, until he felt that he must leap up and break into the harem and catch her in his arms, defiant in the face of all the emasculated guards with all their great scimitars.

He tried to count the minutes, but as he knew not the hour from which he started—although he tried to time himself from the muezzins' call—that was quite useless. Time rushed by while he stood helpless, ready to weep in his impatience.

But never came there a sign from Bessy.

She was lolling on cushions while lamps were lit. Around her the women lay, exhausted after a long day of doing nothing, while they awaited the food they could smell cooking in the kitchens. Some conversed in subdued voices, for at this lamplit hour, boisterousness gave way to drowsy sentiment. One strummed a zither and sang low in a strange tongue, her black-lidded eyes drugged with dreams, her pearl-entwisted plaits drooping on her bare brown shoulders; and others dreamed about her, sucking their necklaces, stroking their own limbs or brushing their hair, pulling the peaks on their little caps. One girl was being painted for a dance that few would bother to watch, but even being painted passed some hours away: she shivered as cold henna dripped from the brush on to her skin.

Yilderim came to Bessy. She swayed in semi-transparent pantaloons with a gold-embroidered armless coat open over her breasts, and with her coarse black hair plaited with blue ribbons.

"Are you better, little blossom?" she asked, her long teeth twinkling when she smiled, the lips being thickly red and ever open. "Poor little *hanoum-effendim*, were you dreaming of last night?"

"Why of last night?" asked Bessy, turned from her.

"Hist, little peacock!" Yilderim pressed gentle fingers on Bessy's thighs and held her to the pallet. "Do not go," she said, "for I am your friend, although you hate me. Why should I care whether you love this janissary?"

"I love the bey alone," said Bessy.

"Yea, yea, so do we all! for we must love the man that buys us, lest we be shamed by being sent home. The Prophet might say that if a woman fears that her husband treats her ill, it is no sin for her to break the love-agreement, for the souls of men are miserly. But we are not wives, we are the slaves of the defender of Islam: there is no law for us; although the Prophet entreated men to be kind to their household, men yet forget his words and beat and ill-treat us, because we are women and slaves. The Prophet gave men four wives and many concubines, but alas! we wretched women must share one man with many."

"So that men may rear more children, for a man without children is a man without a tail and is shamed."

"Yea," said Yilderim; "yet you have bred no sons."

"Allah has not blessed me. . . ."

"Nor me," said Yilderim; "is it therefore sin in us to seek to obey Allah by having children, even though by sinful ways?"

"I want no child," said Bessy with a shudder, thinking of a brown baby with heathen blood in it.

"I would be your friend," said Yilderim. "I will stand guard while you seek . . . shall we say to reward the son of paradise with a son?"

Bessy smiled. The trick was too open to entrap her with—as Yilderim thought—Michael, to send her to death from the top of a tower so that Yilderim might usurp her couch.

"I want no stranger son," said Bessy. "I am the slave at the feet of the bey."

"You are foolish," smiled Yilderim, "for I would help you." Yea, gladly would she help this white slut to destroy herself so that she might proclaim her sin. "Trust me, little blossom," she whispered: "I am your true friend."

"I have naught to trust you with," said Bessy, and closed her eyes.

Yilderim took Bessy's feet, slipped off the sandals, and placed the soles between her breasts while she kissed the toes and fondled the ankles.

"She does not trust me," she whispered loudly, "nay, little toes, she does not trust her Yilderim who is the friend of lovers, yearning so for love herself. Strange are these *hanouns* from white northern lands, jealous and proud-stomached, yet so beautiful beside us muddy daughters of the Peacock. Why does the little blossom not trust her slave? The little blossom is angry, yet is it sin that she should have two husbands? Has not each *tchelebi*, each lord of us, as many concubines as even the most amorous could desire? . . ."

Bessy shut her eyes, for despite her hatred of this woman, the gentle touch of her hands soothed her like a lover's, and she lay back, trembling as she thought of Francis waiting and of the long hours to pass before these women slept and she could steal to him. . . . Yilderim would be watching, she would follow. . . . Then Yilderim must suffer for it. If necessary, she would kill the bitch. . . . For Francis had sworn to take her from this hateful land. How he was to rescue her she did not know, she knew naught of what went on beyond these walls, but she had full trust in him, for he was a man, and she loved him. He would save her somehow. . . .

Let the bitch of a bitch caress her, she would learn naught from her by such tricks . . . and it was very pleasant . . . her touch . . . the right accompaniment to dreams.

So Bessy dreamed.

The time for meeting must surely have passed?

Francis gripped the sides of the aqueduct and with the cold pressing into his skin, seeping into his buttocks, he shivered. Now must Peter Unticaro have gone to call the Master of the Roads . . . now must he be walking through the streets with him, entering the shop . . . now must John Fox be lifting his rusty sword. . . .

God, God, God! . . . why did she not come? Francis's eyes hurt and his neck was stiff from glaring up to where the plaque lay under darkness.

"Please God," he groaned aloud, "please, please hurry her. . . ."

But only the echoes of his own voice sounded: the plaque did not move, her little feet did not wriggle down, her long legs in lacy breeches did not kick above him. Darkness stood undisturbed on every side and seemed to him to be listening, as if sensate, watching him. It was living darkness. . . . Nay, it was but darkness, merely darkness. . . . See, he could push his arm into it, wring it in his fingers: just darkness . . . yet it pressed on his eyes as if thumbing them preparatory to gouging. Darkness. . . . One thought of devils in the dark. Children were scared in darkness. He, too, had been scared of it once, taking his hobby-horse upstairs with him and tucking it under the sheets: a strip of wood with a painted horse's head on which he would gallop astride to kill the dons around the corner, he would hold it tight at night and feel protected by it, for children are scared of the dark. But he was no child. He was a sailorman who knew the dangers of a squall, who had felt death's hand on his shoulder on many a sea, who had fought infidels on his own ship, who had known tavern brawls in strange seaports. Men were not frightened of the dark, not even of velvet darkness like this that pressed up like a woman, feeling him, thumbing for his eyes. . . .

"To hell," he said, "to hell with you, to hell!" then cringed to hear the echo whisper: "hell . . ." as if the words were caught in goblin throats that lisped in answer: "hell."

He must not talk to it. They said that that was sign of madness, to talk to the dark; why? He had often talked to himself; often at night at sea he had trod the deck and listened to the whipstaff creak under his feet and had talked in his beard, chattering about winds and tides and what he would do when he reached port. To be mad, some said, was a sign of God in you, so if he talked to himself and that meant that he was going mad, it also meant that he had God in him, therefore he could not be mad in any shameful sense but in a God-sense which should be above sanity. . . . But this was madness itself, to mutter this way.

His beard prickled when he clutched it, yet at the ends it was soft because it was long since it had been trimmed, and it was growing long, too. A jest! madmen do not pun, ergo, he was not mad! His beard was long because it was now long since it was trimmed. He must tell Fox that, for it was a barber's jest, a barbarous jest. What was Fox doing? O, Jesu dear, what was Fox doing? had he yet struck the Master of the Roads with his rusty sword? ah, rusty sword of God that yet struck clean, knight of the rusty sword, John Fox. . . . He would dub him so when next he smiled into his eyes. Would he ever again smile into John Fox's eyes?

Dear God, would he ever see John Fox again?

That fear was so fierce that it made him sweat in the cold that then froze the sweat on his skin. He must see John Fox again. Fox was his one hope of reaching dear England, of hearing English voices,

of drinking English ale in English taverns when the hawthorn was white and pink in the woods and the lasses trooped out maying. He must see John Fox. . . . It was madness to crouch here in the dark while Bessy was but that roof above him. He dared not wait. He would die, yea, die by his own hand, if he did not get Bessy to the galley in time. . . .

He leaped from the aqueduct, then leaped back again and began to scramble on the stones to reach the plaque, when he heard a plaque lifted, then thrown down. He paused and listened fearfully. That was Michael's plaque. He had tossed down a rope and there were Michael's legs, Michael's body, there was Michael's face grinning at him with great moustachios; Michael's sword tailed out, pushing up his coat, while his hand gripped a lamp.

"She has not come, my sweet friend?" laughed Michael, and swayed in the mud, the light spilling about him.

"You are drunk," said Francis. "I thought that janissaries did not drink."

"Nay, but they do, although they should not, and has my sweet friend never done what he should not? never lusted after a wench in a bey's harem? Never, my friend? It is true I am drunk and that I find it very pleasant, being drunk. Never have I drunk before; but I found that jar of yours and I thought: What is this poison that gives strength to cowards? so I tasted, and I liked the taste, and therefore tasted more. It is fire in your veins, you could open a lion's jaws and spit on its tongue with this liquor's strength in you. Have you no more, brother?"

"No more," said Francis. The man was very drunk. He saw it now as he drew near, swinging the lanthorn, yellow light jerking over him, spilling on chin, moustachios and nostrils, glittering on the pale eyes. He seemed very merry and therefore Francis knew that he was dangerous and wondered what trick he meant to play. He could not have betrayed him; had he done so, armies of Turks would have tumbled after him. Nay, it seemed he plotted somethin more subtle, but what? what could he have done?

"Did you take my message to Bessy?" asked Francis.

Michael put the lamp in the mud and almost fell with it, but jerked himself suddenly upright and hiccuped loudly.

"It fires guns in my belly," he said; "it has gunpowder in it, that wondrous Christian liquor. Now I am no longer Turk if the Prophet would ban that golden ichor. I am all Christian of the bottle, yea, a bottle Christian."

"Did you take my message to Bessy?" asked Francis.

"I put it in her little hands," said Michael, grinning, "and she kissed it. Not the hand, but your message. Or was it the hand? No matter, 'twas for you, that kiss, my bridegroom on an aqueduct. Let all be ready for the couching, we await the bloody rag, yea, we mourners at a wedding. Proclaim the red kerchief and let the flutes

play and the drums strike up. Let us dance at this funeral of a wedding when no maidenheads be gathered, no cloth of sacrifice be tossed the mob as proof the woman does not cheat. Where is the bride? ah, where?" He clapped his hands and peered about him, whistling, chucking with his lips as if calling chickens. "There is no bride," he said. "Ah, wicked bride! may Allah curse your barren loins, O, heartless bride that has not come."

"No," said Francis, "she has not come."

"Most melancholy groom," smiled Michael, sliding in the wet as he threw wide his arms. "Let me stay to mourn with you, let us weep together, we deserted lovers, let us pool our tears, because she has not come, that heartless jade in a harem. Mayhap the bey has called her. Yea, do not despair, beloved. She has been called to duty and mayhap now lies snuggling under his beard, snorting and snuffling at his kissing. Eh, brother? Who can tell? Women are beyond our understanding, for we are men, and cannot tell whether they lie in saying they do not lie. Would you had another bottle! What years have I wasted under the barren vine! not to have drunk before! A cruel Mohammed to forbid such nectar! And did he not forbid it because some drunkards once disturbed him in his preaching? He must have liked his own voice well, to ban wine that he might hear it. . . . No wine left; so there is, indeed, cause to mourn: I for the wine and you for a bride. Are we not sad fools, brother?"

"Why do you smile?" asked Francis. He sat on his haunches on the edge of the aqueduct, ready to spring if the rogue were to draw his sword, and trying to read the truth beneath his drunken maunderings. The fellow was jubilant as if after victory, and that victory, whatever it might be, Francis knew meant harm to him. But he had not blabbed to the bey; that was certain. . . . Did he then intend to take vengeance into his own hands? to kill him here and let the water be his grave, so that Bessy, when she descended, might be mocked with a corpse for lover?

"It is the wine in me that smiled," said Michael, "it is not me. I am sad and sick unto death because you sit on an aqueduct like a frog while your mistress snores with the bey."

"She is with the bey? are you sure?"

"I am sure of naught but my own unhappiness," said Michael. "Mayhap she is not with the bey but sports it with her women, jesting while she kisses their mouths, four-breasted beast, and weeps to think you wait here in the cold, with neither love or hope of love."

Francis took a deep breath to calm his anger: the rascal had confessed—he had not given Bessy that message, for he had said: "with neither love nor hope of love." How knew he that, unless he still had the letter in his sleeve or Bessy had told him that she could not come? Most likely Bessy had not even seen the letter Yea, he had hidden it or destroyed it, dark maggot of love; he pinned his

lips on the truth to relish his own foolish chatter, like a man outside a cage tickling an animal with promises of escape while he keeps the key in his mouth.

Like thunder sounded Francis's heart in his ears and he felt giddy and could see Michael as if through a mist, as if they were both under water. It was a mist of rage, rising at the thought that Fox and his merry fellows would soon be sailing and that Bessy did not know of it. Bessy would not be aboard that ship, nor would he; Fox would turn her nose to England, but his would be a Bessyless, Francisless cargo. And all because of this drunken bald-headed moustachioed traitor grinning up with obvious delight to see Francis's perplexity. Ah! groaned Francis, if he but had a weapon . . . something stronger than this knife . . . he would have killed the villain and have known at least that satisfaction. But he had no weapon and must sit, biting his knuckles, glaring at that tall figure standing in a puddle of light from the lamp; sunk in despair, he crouched, eaten with rage he dared not reveal. Somehow, he told himself, he must keep calm until he saw his chance to kill the rogue; and at last he managed to say in a low voice that did not tremble:

"No hope of love?"

"Did I say no hope?" Michael stared owlishly at him. "That was my tongue again and the wine at my tongue's root. I did not speak. Or did I? She will come. Of course, she will come. Would five hundred eunuchs with sharp scimitars hold her from her lover? May she die the death of a thousand cuts, may she be sewed like a kitten in a bag and drowned at sea, if she betrays you while you shiver here without her love to warm you. Nay, brother, she will come . . . some time . . . mayhap. . . ."

"You did not give her my message?"

Francis tried not to say those words, but they seemed jerked out of him against his will. His body was shaking with rage, as if he had been running fast, and he panted. No question of it now! she was not coming until the late hour, as she had promised, when the others slept. And that would be too late. Michael had not told her to come earlier. The rascal intended Francis to stew in a sweat of waiting. That was why he had come here now, to gloat on his agony, as Roman kings and popes were said to sit and smile while poisoned guests at their table writhed to death. She would come late, as they had arranged last night, long after Fox had sailed; and all because of this damned smiling villain gloating on his wicked work. Ah, God, if he had a sword, what joy would it have been to slash the villain down! But Francis had no sword, only a broken-bladed knife, and Michael, he knew, would gleefully welcome the chance to play him on his sword-point.

"Not give the message?" said Michael, making pretence to look aggrieved. "Why should I not give it? I had it on my tongue, and

when we kissed, I spat it in her mouth. Mayhap she swallowed it like a fly. Who knows? Women are often greedy."

"Liar! you did not kiss her!"

"Liar?" Michael swayed back, his right hand on his sword-grip as he glared at Francis, showing his teeth. "You called me liar? dog!"

"Yea, liar!" cried Francis, trembling, not caring if the rogue did use his sword. Rage had become too great for caution to control. He only knew that he hated Michael, all his body hated and tingled to kill him.

"No," said Michael with a twisted smile, "I will not kill you. . . . That is too swift, too clean a way for such as you. Call me what you like, words do not slime like spittle. The more you howl the sweeter be my pleasure, for your howling is sign of your stricken soul. Howl, dog, howl! howl for your mistress! You called me liar, but you are the liar. There was no boat hidden. I searched each grain of sand along the coast, farther than you could have walked, and there was no boat."

"Of course there was no boat," jeered Francis. "Fool to believe I'd tell your treacherous ears the truth."

"You lied to me? I knew it. Why then should I not lie to you? Yea, and spit on you!" He spat and, in his frenzy, almost fell. Francis tensed his muscles, ready to spring, but the joy went quickly from him as Michael righted himself, and stood reeling, his eyes glowing whitely, while his fingers danced on the sword-pommel. "Drown yourself, fool!" said he, "you haunt this darkness for naught! She is not coming! no, she is not coming! Do you hear? I did not mean to tell, not yet, but your infidel wine has undone me and made me blab. I meant to watch you sweat before you died. As one smells food before eating, I wanted to smell your fear before I killed you! That is the Turk in me, for which I thank God, either God. We Turks are subtle with our enemies. No need to hurry death, for death ends the pleasure of watching death come in your face."

His eyes burned on darkness. He was mad, and Francis shivered, not so much with fear, as with the awe one feels when a spirit passes by, when something ghostly chills your skin, for Michael was not natural, save in the sense that simpletons are so called. He was not human and was therefore doubly terrifying as clumsily he dragged the sword out of its sheath and kissed the curved blade that burst to silver light as he spun it near the lanthorn.

Francis dared not move. He crouched on the aqueduct, watching warily, almost glad that action had come at last to bounce him from this tight-rope of suspense.

"I had not meant to tell you yet," said Michael. "I meant to sit and watch your misery, to see fear blossom in you as time slid by, but my tongue blabbed. . . . Why should you groan, my friend? Think of what the Prophet told of women and the philosophers who

followed in his steps. Some called them bags of muck, but that I think mayhap unfair. And was it not the Prophet who said, 'All the inhabitants of hell are women, boasters and tyrants'? and that obedience to a woman, he said, is ever repented, for 'Trust not a king, a horse or a woman,' he said. He was a wise man, that Prophet, even though he was not mayhap holy, according to the Christian faith. I know not, but he was wise, wiser than we."

He staggered a little and that was Francis's opportunity. Francis's hands were resting on the stones he had gathered and, not daring to pause to think, he threw the largest. It caught Michael as he swayed, caught him full on the chest, and sent him on his back into the muck. Then Francis leaped on to the stones. By jumping, he could just touch the plaque, so, sobbing with haste, he drew his dagger and stabbed up with the pommel, stabbed with all his strength until the plaque lifted, shifted over a little, sufficient to give his fingers a grip on the side as he leaped up.

He hung by both hands, groaning while he tried to regain his breath, then he exerted all his strength and dragged himself up and into the harem.

This was some kind of kitchen. He could smell spices and saw a charcoal fire grey and red on a flat brass pan. There were jars on the painted shelves and tubs of refuse on the floor. He stood, panting, and heard the voices of women near by. To his right lay the harem.

Knife in hand, he dragged aside the curtain and stood, blinded by the light. Women lay or lounged about him, women unveiled, gaping, too startled yet to scream. He saw them in their little coats and bright breeches, round caps, peaked caps, some naked, some semi-dressed, black bodies like breathing porphyry, brown skin, yellowish skin, white skin . . . Bessy.

"Bessy!" he cried, and at his cry, women screamed and ran hither and thither like birds disturbed in a cage, trying to conceal their faces while often their rumps showed bare, snuggling under sheets, darting up and down the room, tearing at the curtains for protection, and all screaming, screaming.

"Bessy!" cried Francis.

"Go!" said Yilderim, and smacked her. "Go!" She saw a eunuch run through the door, scimitar out. Let the fool go with her lover, go! that herself might be queen. . . .

"Go!" she screamed, as the eunuch tumbled against the wailing fear-blind women.

Francis caught Bessy as she ran to him, and kicked aside a black woman about to hit him with a low table.

"To the aqueduct," he gasped and pushed her into the kitchen. She saw the hole in the floor and for a moment drew back instinctively.

"Quick!" cried Francis.

It was Yilderim who pushed her, tumbled her down. Francis smiled his gratitude as he followed, and it was Yilderim who fell before the curtains, dragging them over the plaque, screaming that the infidel had killed her; she was dying, she howled, and she kicked when they tried to drag her back. He had killed her, she howled, and then she suddenly went limp in pretence of swooning. . . . She would be queen now, the white sow would be destroyed when they caught her. . . . The bitch had gone with her lover and could not escape, and when taken even she would not be able to lie herself out of this blatant proof.

Yilderim smiled as they lifted her and carried her away while they shouted for ropes and ladders, quickly, quickly. . . .

"Into the aqueduct," gasped Francis. Shaken as he was by the fall, his terrors temporarily killed all pain. He picked up Bessy, who moaned, for she had fallen on some stones and her head was bleeding, and he lifted her to the aqueduct.

"We must swim," he whispered. "Can you swim?"

"Nay," she moaned.

He dragged himself up behind her and turned his head. Some sound, the crack of trodden-on wood, the squelch of mud, perhaps, made him turn, and there stood Michael, muddy, without his hat, his shaven skull grotesque over the moustachios, stealing towards him with scimiatar in hand.

Francis dived, one arm about Bessy, as that scimitar struck and jarred on the stone. He bobbed up to take a deep breath and seeing the hands of Michael on the rim, he thumped with his fists until those fingers limply let go.

"A deep breath, for God's sake," he cried; "then down."

He could see only the dark shape of Bessy as she lolled on his arm, and he feared she was stunned, but then he heard her gulp the air, and knew that she had heard him, so he dived, his arm about her; and the rush of water in his ears stilled the shouting, the far beat of drums, the clash of shoes above. . . .

Knowing the distance was but short, he did not swim fast, but being tired, paddled along. Then he lifted Bessy, pushed up her chin so that she could taste the fetid air, and he pushed up his chin beside hers, while both breathed for a moment, then he dived again, Bessy with both hands on his shoulders.

He was no longer afraid, but the excitement of the last few minutes had drained him momentarily of strength. Fox would still be waiting, he was certain of that now; God would not have aided them so far to let them be trapped at the end, the escape of the slaves already started.

Yea, the lamp shone under Peter's shop. When they came from under the tunnel, into the air again, he lifted Bessy and she drew

herself on to the edge of the aqueduct, while they gasped together, his arm around her waist. Not far away, above one of the smaller tributaries of the giant aqueduct on which they rested, the lamp shone, guiding to freedom.

"There," said Francis, "they are waiting for us. Not long now, my love."

They kissed slowly as if all time was theirs.

"It is a dream," she whispered.

"A dream from which we will not wake," said he. "Come, love, we must waste no more time. We must to that lamp."

"I cannot swim," she said.

"Put both hands on my shoulders, as you did before . . . like that . . . just cling there. You'll be safe. Let your legs go loose and trail behind."

He paddled slowly, like a dog, and as yet was unable to realise his joy, to savour it to its full, with Bessy's painted hands on his shoulders, while now and then she floated up, pressed on him, her breasts against his back. . . . The dirty water was lapping the dirt from her skin, lapping off kohl and henna, the painted palm-leaves and arabesques, laving it back to Christian skin, as unblemished as when it had first been moulded by God's thumb. The paint of the infidel was being wiped off and with it the foulnesses of the bey's clippings and lippings of her. She was being rebaptised in this noisome water, washed clean of sin, made fresh for Christian loving. Francis smiled and felt that he had never been so happy before, would never know such happiness again: escape from the terror of near-death and torture with the woman he loved resting her fingers on his shoulders, her hair trailing around them, strands floating ahead, as if it were a golden island on which they floated.

They were both happy in that voluptuous exhaustion following dangers narrowly escaped; all fire was gone from their flesh and they were at peace, as in after-love . . . at peace together, floating on this dirty smelling water scummed with leaves and ordure, her hair about them.

He paddled into a side aqueduct that led directly under Peter's light and he saw the ladder waiting.

"There, love," he said, "your father awaits us."

He heard the gasp of her breath caught in a sob and felt her fingers tighten on his shoulders, the nails digging deep.

"Father?" she wailed.

"Yea, John Fox, your father. . . ."

"Does he know I am coming?"

"Not yet. . . ."

She sprang from him, kicking against him, and he turned to catch her. But she was quick as a fish, sliding from his fingers, beating him off, until he gripped her hair and held it.

"Let go!" she sobbed, "let me go, you beast!"

She clung with both arms to the side of the aqueduct and he saw the hunch of her shoulders, saw her body quiver, the backbone arch, as if she were being impaled on the stone. In the semi-darkness her eyes glittered.

"Bessy," he said, "you must not be afraid. All this plot is John's. Without him we would have no hope of getting out of Alexandria. Remember, love, he is your father."

"Would to God I could forget it!" she cried and showed her teeth, her nostrils broadening, as she pressed on the stone. Her back was towards him but her face was in profile and in that twilight he could see one eye open as if blind, one great staring eye, palely blue and seeming glazed, the lashes sticking to the lids.

"But your own father," he said, feeling angry in his helplessness before her sudden silence, her deep breathing that was like the breathing of a cornered animal in panic. He saw that one eye shift in its slot as if it sought some way of escape. "He must love you," he said. "A father must."

"He hates me," she said, her mad eye roving to glare at him. "Why did you not tell me? why? to lead me here like this . . . to this! May God forgive you, for now I must drown. There is no other way. I can't go back. You've robbed me of that. And I cannot go up there. No! no, no! I cannot!"

"But chuck, sweet chuck, you must. How can you tell what he will say until you see him? You have been brooding too long in that harem. He will open his arms and weep to have his child again."

"I know his hate," she cried; "I sent once, thinking to help him, but he wrote *whore* across my letter and refused all help. . . . He will kill me if he sees me."

"Never," said Francis, trying to smile as he smoothed her hair with his fingers, whispering to her as though she were a child sobbing at phantoms, and she flinched like a frightened animal from his touch. And he, too, flinched at thought of Fox with his Moses-like judgments. There would be little pity in that heart steeled in ancient Hebrew lore, he would break the tablets at the sound of any wickedness and to him, Francis feared, Bessy in these breeches and with the smeared paint on her skin would be as the naked Israelites before the Golden Calf. And had not Moses commanded the sinners to slay each man his brother, each man his companion, each man his neighbour? Francis knew too well how Fox would interpret that, but the proximity of Bessy gave him strength. He had only to touch her skin, to clench his fingers in her hair, to have his terrors exorcised and to feel himself the equal even of John Fox.

"He will do naught when I am by," he said, and tried to draw her to him.

But she wriggled away, pulling herself up on the side of the aqueduct with both arms. He saw the curve of her back, the soft arrowhead below the arched spine, plain under sodden cloth, as she

tried to scramble to the top of the aqueduct. But he held her tightly round the thighs and would not let her go.

"Let me go," she sobbed, but he lifted her, dragged her back until her fingers lost their grip. She punched down at him, spitting, moaning. She was quite mad with fear and pushed him under the water, and in the water they rolled, sickened with the vile taste, until at last he broke free and caught her from the back, holding both arms behind her.

She was quiet now and lay exhausted on the water. Her eyes were still open and she panted, the breath seeming to jar inside her, to swell up her breasts, then suddenly to let them fall again, to swell again. . . . But the fight had gone out of her. She was dazed and looked stupidly at him.

"Please," she whimpered, "don't take me to him, Frankie—don't."

"What can he do to you? Please, love, be calm. I will be beside you."

"You will not leave me, Frankie? . . ."

"Of course, love, I'll not leave you. . . . Never."

They were under the lamp and the ladder and Francis gripped the lowest rung.

"Go first," he said.

She pressed against him, clinging to him with both arms, and her breath was hot on his cheek as she whispered: "I dare not! O, no . . . please."

"Up," said he, smiling; "he will do naught. I'll be at your heels," yet his heart, too, was cold as he thought of John Fox waiting there with that gripless rusty sword.

"Dear God," she said, "O, God!" then, "Kiss me, Frank."

He kissed her mouth and she threw both arms about him, almost tumbling him under again as she kissed him fiercely in return, as if this were a farewell kiss before they went to die. Then as she drew back, she said:

"I dare not," and he felt her body shudder against him.

"I'll be beside you," he smiled. "Up, my lady!"

"You first," she said.

"I will follow. Come, sweet!"

He lifted her and, sighing reluctantly, she drew herself on to the ladder. He saw her rise, a gleaming mermaid, from the waters up into the light, her golden hair twisted about her body that was clearly seen through the thin wet cloth. She looked down, white-faced, at him and her blue eyes were huge, while her mouth was open, in her fear.

He caught the bottom rung and, as he was about to rise, felt arms around him, lifting him, and was flung suddenly back. Stunned almost by the abruptness of that fall, head smacking the water, he went down, choking, then tried to rise but found fingers tight on his

throat, pushing him under, under, under water. He fought to struggle but could not, for there was water in his mouth and belly and his breath was gone. With the nausea of death in his mouth, of death on his blind eyes, he felt that some demon had leaped on him, that some goblin fish was gobbling him, while with his fingers he strove feebly to break that killing hold on his throat. He must not die, not with the light of freedom on his eyeballs, not with that sight of Bessy, body sculptured in wet cloth, yellow hair about her, her eyes huge with the kohl smeared down her cheeks, her skin silvery-yellow under the lamp that twinkled on her rings and bracelets . . . not now! he must not die!

But he could no longer struggle, he could but grope futilely against water that seemed to be turning solid, to be growing heavy, impossible to push away, while there was fire in his chest, fire blazing behind his eyes. . . .

Suddenly he bobbed up and gasped and spat and groaned, the fingers gone from his throat.

Bessy swung on the ladder. He saw her dimly in the light from the hole in the roof. The lamp had vanished. Then he saw it gripped flameless but bloody in Bessy's hand and saw light fluttering, blue and green, along the water. Into those flames rose Michael's shaven head gleaming in a halo of flickering colour, as though in hell. Blood was dribbling down his forehead, blood pinkish with water.

"You?" whispered Michael, his eyes huge in caverns, the eyeballs back, showing whites. "Bessy . . . don't . . . not you. . . ."

"Yes, me!" sobbed Bessy, and threw the dead lamp at him.

She caught Francis's hand and forced his fingers to curl on the ladder-rung and there he gripped and coughed and spluttered as the flames rippled, dancing, on the water around the bubbles above where Michael had sunk. Francis tried to smile at seeing Bessy like a bird's shadow over him, wet sleeves dangling from her arms; and beyond, in the circle in the floor, black faces gaped at him—Fox, Crouch and others gaping down—and he waved feebly at them, trying to smile while he clung to Bessy lest he fall.

CHAPTER XIV

SWORDS UNSHEATHED

BESSY was now the man, the protector, for Francis could but shiver and choke, still dazed with the fear of death. She hooked his stiff fingers on the ladder-rungs and pushed him up with her shoulder until eager hands above caught his wrists and dragged him, dripping, to the floor of Peter's kitchen. He lay sobbing, trying to breathe,

in a pool of water as if he melted, while he smiled like an idiot at his friends. There stood John Fox, the gripless rusty sword in one hand, his eyes brightly smiling; there was Gabriel, tears in his eyes while he grinned, showing yellow teeth, as he fumbled Francis's arms. There were the faces of loved comrades looking down on him, dark before the gold light of the lamp: Will Wickney's lewd eye winked, the other eye frozen in disapproval; Rob Moore was grinning and chattering that Francis was Pisces and could not drown; Dave Tipton ran his tongue along his lips that had gone dry with fear for his friend's death; Dick Saltinstall, B.A., Cambridge, was forcing cordial between Francis's chattering teeth and telling him that all he needed was a meal of English pickled herring to make him well; and Andy Perde was dragging his fingers in his beard while he cursed all Turks in Turkish.

Friends, good friends, at last. . . . Francis grinned, the mere sight of them, sound of their voices, giving him strength.

"The girl," said Will Wickney, "where is she?" He went to the hole and peered down but could see only blackness.

"Yea!" cried Fox. "I feared she would be a drag upon our arms but she can deal a blow that a man would be proud of!"

"Yea," said Dave Tipton, "she swung that lamp as if all her life she had been bashing janissaries on the head."

"You'd have been a deader," said Wickney to Francis, "but for her. He had you under when she bashed him on the dome!"

"And not content with that," grinned Fox, "she must bash him again when he bobbed up. She is a goodly wench." He knelt beside Wickney and stared down into the aqueducts. He saw the water ripple under the faint light, but the girl he could not see.

"Lass," he shouted, "where be you?" but only his own voice echoed back. "Before God," he cried, "she must not drown! Give me a light, lads."

Rob Moore passed him a candle and he drew up the cord that had held the lamp and knotted it to the candle, then he lowered it slowly lest the flame flicker out. But it flickered up, spitting grease, and its soft light edged along the crouching body of Bessy. She was on the rim of the aqueduct, hands over her face, for she was more feared of Fox than even of death or the bey's vengeance. He had been such a strict if loving father and she knew his faith in God and his hatred of any who betrayed Him; she remembered her loving note sent back with *whore* scrawled over it in tall letters, so angrily written that the charcoal had snapped on the parchment. Had she known that her father was Francis's friend she would never have dared this adventure; so now she knelt in numbing terror, not knowing what to do and wishing she had drowned during that swim, wishing she had broken her head when tumbling from the harem.

"Wait there, lass!" she heard Fox cry, then heard his steps on the ladder, heard the ladder creak. He was coming down to her. She

moaned and turned to run from him, then slid on the stone and, gratefully, felt waters close about her. She tried to stop her arms from struggling; better far to die than to see the hatred in her father's eyes.

But she was plucked from the water. Strong hands caught her legs and drew her up and she lay, shuddering, in someone's arms. The hair veiled her face, and she was glad of it when she heard her father's voice, so close she felt his breath like ice on her skin.

"Come, lass," he said, "you must not die now that we have plucked you out of hell. Steady, girl."

His child again, she clung to him and sobbed, while he pushed his left arm under her armpits and drew her up, pulling with his right hand on the ladder. She shut her eyes on the light as men's fingers caught and lifted her.

On the floor she lay, feeling very naked, the thin garments wet and clinging to her skin. Hair alone was her covering and she dragged it from the grip of jewels to press against her face. Thus she crouched, doubled up, in that circle of men, and heard Francis say:

"Have no fear, my love, you are safe now."

"Yea," she heard Fox say gently, "yet 'tis good to find such modesty in a wench. Would that we had some Christian garments to cover her up. . . . Come, lass! let us see your face."

But she shrank, whimpering, from his touch.

"Bessy," said Francis, "be not afraid. You are with friends now."

"Bessy!" cried Fox. "Is that Bessy?" She heard him take a deep breath and felt that her doom was on her. "Had I known the whore," he cried, "I'd have left her! Better for her to drown in her sins than to live to shame me! Bessy, is it you, wench? Speak to me, or by God . . ." He gripped her wrists and dragged down her hands and stared at her, then holding both wrists in his left hand, he pulled her hair with his right so sharply from her face that it tugged at the roots and hurt.

"So you have come to plague us!" he said; "you must come with devil's eyes to foul God's work! The adventure is damned, gentlemen, for we have a whore amongst us. Look upon her!" he pushed her aside and stood back, panting. "Yea, gentlemen," he said, "look well upon the harlot. She was a Christian once, my child I loved; but she'd not the stomach to risk martyrdom. She was a bondsmaid to the Egyptians, but not content with that, must abandon Christ and clasp whoredom in the brothel of the bey."

"John," cried Francis, staggering to his feet, "you must not speak like that to her!"

"To my own child!" Fox glared at him as if he would hit him and, panting, raised his sword.

"To my wife," said Francis; and while Fox gaped at him as though he were mad, he said steadily, looking Fox in the eyes: "We marry

at the first Christian port we reach. She is no longer yours to judge, John, she is mine and, as her husband, I judge her as sinless who sinned against her will."

He went to Bessy and put his arm about her shoulders and she clung weeping to him while he patted her shoulders, but he did not turn his eyes from Fox, who still glared at him as though he thought him mad.

"Why should you demand from a woman the stomach of a man?" said Francis. "She is a woman, too gently fleshed for martyrdom. God save me! but I shudder to think she bedded with that beast! . . . yet have I pity on her as God had pity on the daughters of Martha. Would you dare cast the first stone when our Saviour took the woman who sinned into His pity? And Bessy kept Christ living in her heart while living in that hell, and she taught His word to those who were blind. With her lips, mayhap, she renounced Him but words did not wring Him from her heart. And you dare judge her!"

"The boy is mad," said Fox, and licked his lips.

"If it is madness to love," said Francis, "then call me mad. For this is the woman I love."

"You would marry the whore?" cried Fox.

"I will marry this lass, yea, right willingly, and proud am I to take her. She saved my life just now. You all did see it. But I loved her before then, I have loved her since I was a boy. And I will not give her up."

Fox sat on the low table and stroked his beard and cocked his head at Francis like a bird. "Loud does the puppy yap," said he. "You are bewitched, young fool; the flesh has so ensnared you that you can even think to peril our adventure with a cargo of delicately painted sin, all honeycomb without but worms for heart. My child she was; may God forgive me that I bred a traitor unto God! but yet do I not recall God's words in Ezekiel, was it not said that there were sins even in Jerusalem, and that there were two daughters of one mother, two mighty harlots named Aholah the elder and Aholibah the younger? There squats our Aholah-Aholibah of Alexandria, yea! for it was written that these sisters, if I forget not, committed whoredoms in Egypt, and this is Egypt; that in Egypt their breasts were pressed and in Egypt they bruised the teats of their virginity; yea, in Egypt! So is it written in the Holy Book. I can recall the words that haunted me in youth and put the terror of God into me, of this beast amongst women who bruised the breasts of her virginity and had whoredom poured upon her. So she played the harlot in this land of Egypt, she who was two sisters who now crouch there! Yea, and the Lord struck at her, saying: 'They shall strip you of your clothes and take away your jewels, they shall deal with you hatefully because you have gone a-whoring after the heathen. You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow,' said the Lord, 'with the cup of desolation, you will drink of it and suck it out and you will break

the shards thereof and pluck off your own breasts, for I have said it,' said the Lord God!"

While he spoke, mouthing the words with relish as if they were sweet food, his eyes never blinked from Bessy where she crouched behind Francis. And he smiled in his beard as his eyes glittered, as though he were, in truth, Ezekiel howling hatred on the pollution of Jerusalem. Like that old prophet of doom, he stood, his beard out-jutting and his yellow teeth showing, while he spoke of the flesh with a kind of holy lust to Bessy who quivered and dragged her hair over her white face.

"Yea, hide," said he, "lest we throw you like lewd Jezebel to the dogs. Lest as the righteous men did unto Aholibah, the woman who played the harlot with the Assyrians, for they stoned her with stones and slew her with swords and burnt up her brothel with fire. 'Thus,' said the Lord God, 'will I cause lewdness to cease in the land, that all women may be taught not to follow you in your lewdness, and you shall know that I am the Lord God,' he said."

"But you are not God," said Francis, "you are John Fox, a man born in sin like all of us."

Fox shuddered as though just awakened and he clenched his teeth as he snarled at Francis, flecks of foam on his lips.

"Yea," said he, "sinful am I, therefore will I not overweigh my sins by taking that whore with us. What say you, fellows? Shall we sink our ship with a hundredweight of sin?"

He grinned at them in the pale lamplight, and Wickney mumbled: "Let her come."

And Crouch said boldly: "Yea, for the boy loves her; and what right have you, John, to stand between them and to judge them?"

"Yea," muttered Dave Tipton, "we can make space for her."

"Would you destroy our plans, John," said Rob Moore, "just when they are ripe for plucking, by splitting us into factions?"

Fox glared from face to face, his beard out as if to taunt them; slowly he moved his head, snarling and staring them in the eyes, and they shuffled before him; then he roared:

"This is rank mutiny! Thus did the Israelites lose God's face in the desert! Would you turn from God for the sake of a whore who has made herself delicious for the lips of the heathen? See there, the paint on her! the red not natural on her lips that the water would not rub off, but shivered from! See her in man's breeches, showing her rump and her bosom in that thin garment of the devil. Look at her and see the shame of sin on her. Yea, you might well cringe and try to hide, but you cannot hide from God, my child."

He drew the sword slowly up and spat on the blade.

"It has not tasted flesh for many a year," he said. "Shall its first taste be one of judgment? shall it taste first of hot whore's blood?"

Francis stood up; he had but the broken knife with which to fight, but he drew it from his belt and waited, with one hand pushing Bessy behind him.

"I do not want to hurt you, Frank," said Fox, head cocked on one side and his eyes glistening like glass.

"Nor do I wish to hurt you, John," said Francis.

"Then out of my way," said Fox, lounging to his feet.

But Francis did not move. He stood waiting with the broken knife, his face bloodless but unafraid as Fox squinted at him.

Then, "Hisst!" said Rob Moore, and all were instantly silent.

Someone had entered the shop. Fox wheeled round and listened, hunching his shoulders. They heard Peter laugh and chatter in Turkish, then heard the querulous voice of the Master of the Roads whom Peter had enticed to this, his execution. Without a word, Whitney groped to pick up a stool while the others, on tiptoe, went to find what weapons they could, knives and files and spits and pieces of furniture; but Fox held up his arm to hold them back. Bessy clung with both hands to Francis's legs and caught her breath on a sob of relief when Fox stole on his toes to the curtained doorway. The others watched him, tense, ready to spring, while Fox paused to glare at Bessy, and Francis feared lest, even at this moment when the Master of the Roads was waiting to be murdered, Fox's hatred of his daughter should be such that he might kill her first. But he did not hit her, he merely spat, the gob streaking her arm, and turned to the curtain between kitchen and shop.

Taking a deep breath, he pushed it aside and strode through.

A long silence followed, then they heard the shrill voice of the Master of the Roads, voice of terror: there must have been death written on Fox's grin for him to have read his doom so plainly. They heard him wail, then stutter in lingua franca: "O, Fox, what have I deserved of you that you should kill me!"

They heard Fox cry, his voice exultant, and they knew that he smiled. "Villain!" he cried, "you've been the bloodsucker of many a Christian's blood and now you shall learn what to deserve at my hands!"

They saw, through the torn curtain, Fox lift his bright shining sword of ten years' rust and bring it down on the yellow turban that was then suddenly dark with blood; and the sound of the blow was loud, like a clap of hands. The rogue slid to his knees, gasping like a landed fish, while the blood bubbled out of his mouth. The sword remained stuck in his turban and only with a jerk could Fox dislodge it.

"He is stark dead," he said, and grinned.

"Come, freends!" cried Peter.

They caught up their weapons—knives, spits, glaives, pieces of wood—and ran into the shop. Francis held Bessy to him, whispering soothingly as one would to a frightened animal, while his comrades loosed their years of bolted rage on the dying Turk. They kicked

and hit and stabbed him until the floor was slippery with his blood, and John Fox watched and grinned with his bloodied sword tucked under his arm. Nor were they content until they had hacked off the bearded head and had tossed it like a ball from foot to foot, while it dribbled at the twisted sinews and the eyes glared open as if amazed at such indignity.

Then suddenly Fox looked up and, through the door, glared at Bessy. But he did not speak to her, he shuddered from her as he cried:

"Come, comrades, to the bagnio!"

"You must come with us," whispered Francis, and tried to lift Bessy, but her terror of Fox was such that she could not speak, could only stammer, begging to be left to die.

"Nay, love," said he, kissing her, "he'll not harm you. Come."

She clung to him, shivering in her wet garments, while he put his arm around her shoulders and led her past the hacked corpse of the Master of the Roads who would drive no more young boys to hanging. His head hung by its beard from a bracket, upside-down, mouth open, eyes staring while the blood trickled over the chin and plash-plashed to the floor; his limbs were scattered and his entrails thrown into the ashes. Bessy shuddered and hid her face in her hair while her shoes slid in the blood.

The street was bright in moonlight, the while walls toned to violet, the muddy ground a warm chocolate, as they stepped out of Peter's shop. The others had gone and, knowing their destination, Francis hurried his precious burden through lanes and alleys to the harbour. Soon he saw his comrades walking and talking in the road ahead. First went Fox with Peter, while the others were grouped behind them, treading cautiously as if not to disturb the leaders in their conversation. The cold desert wind came whirling sand to grit their mouths and eyelids, but they lifted their chins and smiled, for they could smell the sea when they turned their backs to the desert.

"Even now," whispered Bessy, huddling close to Francis, "I cannot understand why he should hate me so. What else could I have done? better surely to accept suffering, as the Lord teaches us, than to be a beaten slave among ordinary folk who would, indeed, have treated me for a common strumpet? It was not that I loved the bey or knew joy in sinning. What else was I to do?"

Francis could not blame her, yet he could understand Fox's horror because, if he let his mind dwell on it, that horror also shivered in him. He dared not think of Bessy as mistress of the bey, he swore to blot that from his mind, and therefore strove to make her merry with chatter of England, of her own virginal land, and of the peace they would know there together. But she would not be comforted, her fear of Fox being too great, making her a child again, cringing before the master.

"Bear up!" said he, "there is cruel work ahead. Blood must flow and I must have a hand in it. Do not make a coward of me, Bessy, with your tears. I go to fight for your freedom as well as mine. It is not right to go to battle, weakened with fears of one you love. Smile, honey: smile at me, please."

With a strong effort she raised her head and he brushed the pearl-twisted hair from her face that was so pale in moonlight, and he kissed her mouth. She smiled, eyes glittering with tears.

"God be with you, Frank," she whispered. "I do not deserve such love."

"Yet it is all yours, mistress," he laughed, and squeezed her tight. "Stay in the shadows till I return."

The others stood before the garrison, whispering together, nor did Fox even glance at him when Francis joined them with his broken dagger ready. This was the first blow, to slay the guards and rescue the slaves. The gates were unchained, being left open for the Master's return, and they tiptoed within. There were six warders in the guard-house and they must be dealt with swiftly; but quietly though they trod, the creeping avengers were heard. A sleepy voice asked who was that? and Fox answered: grinning:

"Friends;" then he whispered to the others: "My masters, here's now to every man a man, wherefore look you, play your parts," and he kicked in the door.

Turks leaped up, blinking, darting for swords and guns, knocking over the table on which stood bottles and cups. There were six of them, and not one had his chance to draw a sword or shoot a gun. The prisoners were amongst them so suddenly that they could only gape, aghast to see death come at them, as Fox whirled his sword and his mates used what they had, Francis leaping on one tall man and digging him in the throat with his ragged-edged dagger before he could so much as moan. Within a minute, the Turks lay dead and dying, and Fox and his friends trampled their bodies as they searched for arms.

"Bar the gate," said Fox, "and place a cannon against it."

"Stay!" cried Francis, "one moment. . . ."

"Bar the gate," said Fox, glaring at him.

That would be to bar Bessy out, and the ruffian knew it.

"Bar the gate," said Fox, "you disobedient dog!"

Francis ran quickly into the street and looked wildly for Bessy, then he saw her crouching in the shadows, a pale blur on the darkness, and caught her hand and ran with her to the prison. The gates were closing as he pushed her through. Fox set his lips and Francis saw in the moonlight how his eyes shone while he wiped his sword under his arm, but he said no word, although the hatred in those eyes was such that Bessy clung to Francis and tried to shuffle behind him.

Crouch and some others were dragging at a cannon, while Fox locked and barred the gate. Francis ran to help Crouch and pushed on the wheels until the cannon's mouth was pressed on the closed gate, ready to shoot should the infidels come against them from the city.

Then they stood back, panting and grinning, the initial task done and well done. The guard and the Master were all dead. Now for the prisoners' keys and the killing of the wardens and the launching of a ship. There was no difficulty in taking the keys, for the lodge was empty and the keys hung by the dead Master's divan. Here, too, they found a store of arms: scimitars and spears and guns and pistols and knives. But Fox would not change his weapon. Even for a polished scimitar he would not surrender that brown blade. It had done godly work, he said, and it would be like throwing God's gift away to discard it now. He stood amongst them like a master seeing his children at play, but he frowned when Peter wrenched open a chest to show heaped gold.

"Let the gold be," he said.

But these men had been too long starved of wealth. They buried their hands in the metal and chuckled like thirsty men seeing water. Gold was tossed up, it clinked and fell in handfuls, flashing, glittering.

"Touch it not," said Fox, "'tis infidel gold, evil as fairy gold. It is my liberty I seek, and the liberty of my comrades, to the honour of God, and not to make a mart of that wicked treasure of the infidels. Like Saul, would you, you dogs, save the fattest oxen to offer to the Lord, stuffing your shirts with yellow goblins? But remember: Saul did not 'scape the wrath of God with his offering, neither will you with this filth that you lust after. Such is God's justice. He That you put your trust in to deliver you from the tyrannous hands of your enemies, He could supply your wants, but not with gold. For gold lies heavy, it will trip you. You cannot fight with gold about you."

There was wisdom there. Not so much fear of God, but the realisation that gold was heavy, made Crouch and Perde with Moore and Wickney reluctantly unburden themselves. Heavy-hearted, sighing, they flung the gold back into the chest, but Peter and Dave Tipton and Dick Saltinstall stood sullenly aside, their shirts bulging over their belts as if they were fat-breasted women. There was a threat of mutiny in their lowered eyelids and hanging jaws, so Fox did not argue but let them keep their plunder.

"Now," said he, "with these arms we be sufficient champions to face a hundred janissaries, by the help of God. We must free our comrades."

He jingled the keys and strode over the moonlit yard to the great bagnio, the others following. He looked at the keys on their huge ring, savouring the delight of that moment: Moses with keys

to freedom, Moses with a gripless rusty blood-wet sword tucked under his arm; he chose the correct key, pushed it into the lock and turned it.

"Come, fellows!" he cried, "off with your irons! No longer need you make a pretence of them, for the Philistines are no more in the eyes of the Lord!"

His cry brought, not the slaves, but three jailers running from their little chamber. Francis shot one over Fox's shoulder, and the slaves tumbled on the other two, beating them with their chains, leaping on them with both feet.

"You scorched my shoulder," said Fox; "you should shoot higher."

"You moved," said Francis. "I meant no harm."

In the dim light of the shaded candle hung from the beams, they looked on one another, Francis tense for a blow. Slaves pushed by murmuring of God in their joy as they threw away their chains or flung them at the dying jailers. Francis and Fox were pushed, kicked, yet they stayed, swaying, where they were under the flickering light, each with a bloodied sword, for Francis had taken a sword from the guardhouse. Its blade was long and curved and was written on with Turkish lettering. He held it ready, glaring into Fox's eyes, and he did not blink as the slaves stumbled against him.

"Where is the whore?" said Fox.

"You will swallow that word, by God's name," said Francis, gasping with exasperation and rage. "My betrothed awaits me, if she is whom you dare to smear with your foul talk. I swear to have respect for her. Yea, even from her own damned unnatural father will I have respect!"

Fox slowly spat and caressed the sticky blade. "We will speak of this later," he said.

"We will speak of it now," cried Francis, trembling.

"Then," said Fox calmly, "if you would speak of it, I will speak. I say that that woman shall not sail with us, for if she does, we shall lose the help of God and shall be as the damned—will-less, helpless, God's hand lifted from us so that we might drift in devil's fingers. Think you, son, I speak thus lightly when she be of my own flesh, born of that mother in heaven whom I loved? My heart is hot with love of the wench, but she has sinned abominably and is damned. We must be stronger than our hearts' pity."

"Where I go," said Francis through his teeth, "she goes, too."

Fox sighed as he wiped his sword on his backside and there was a kind of querulous pity in his eyes as he looked on Francis. He was about to speak, then stiffened, listening. There was shooting from somewhere outside. He turned immediately, forgetting the quarrel, and ran out, Francis at his heels.

Some warders had escaped and had climbed to the flat roof of the bagnio—Francis counted eight turbaned heads black against the pale sky—and with pistols and matchlocks were shooting into the

massed slaves tumbling out of the bagnio into moonlight. It was a target they could not miss, that swarm of ragged men lifting gaunt arms to freedom, and finding death even as they grinned at the sky. They fought with one another to escape the balls, panic-maddened they ran they knew not whither, yet all silently, for that had been Fox's command. But what need for silence now when matchlocks were roaring and the wounded wailing? Yet silently the slaves pushed and fell and punched one another, each at that moment thinking only of his own safety while death fired at them from the sky.

"Ladders!" shouted Fox; "there be ladders in the guardhouse."

But Peter had already remembered the ladders. He was running with one, the other end caught up by Dave. They slid on the sand in their eagerness while the moon glared white as clouds scudded over; clouds were racing in that high wind, ragged clouds flittering, tossed darkly, witch-clouds.

The ladder was against the bagnio, its horns rose above the roof, while Peter and Dave tussled for the honour of mounting first.

"Be yare!" cried Fox. The fools to waste time about honour while iron balls fell about them, spitting up sand, thudding on stone and killing and maiming men! Quickly did the infidels reload. They must have had spare pistols and matchlocks, they shot so swiftly, for otherwise they'd not have had time to ram ball and charge into hot muzzles to shoot again as rapidly as this.

Fox ran to another group trotting with another ladder and helped them to raise it against the bagnio. He pushed the men aside and seized the rungs, leaping up like a monkey, good sailorman, with Francis at his heels. They saw in the moonlight as they leaped on to the roof the dark shapes of Moslems, onion-headed in turbans, they saw the red blaze of guns and the noise crashed like thunder in their ears. Fox staggered and almost fell, his hand at his side, and he groaned, but Francis caught him and held him up. The ball had merely ripped his shirt and skinned his side and fretfully he pushed Francis off as, with uplifted sword, he leaped amongst the Turks.

Dave was at the next ladder and a Turk's scimitar flamed whitely in moonlight as it fell, and Dave tumbled backwards, howling, down the ladder, overturned by the weight of the gold as much as by that stroke, for the gold turned him topsy-turvy. They heard his scream stop when he hit the ground.

Peter's bulk took Dave's place. He scrambled on to the roof beside Francis and they stumbled against one another in the shadows, seeking to get to grips with the agile enemy; but weighted with gold, Peter moved awkwardly. Gold dragged him back, tugged on the full swing of his arm, and sent him to his knees at last to fall and be trampled and slashed, gold spilling out of him as if he bled yellow.

Clouds hid the moon, then spat it out. Suddenly dark it was one moment, suddenly bright the next; men stumbled on the roof; unsure whether their fingers gripped friend or enemy, they would pause

until the moon spilled its silver again, and then would stand back or set to fighting, according to whom it was they gripped. Fox's dark blade shivered on the turban of a Turk, but the good steel did not break; the Turk shrieked as he toppled backwards over the edge of the roof. They could hear him lowing like a sick animal from where he lay below. But there were other sounds, more menacing sounds: shouts from the Moslem fisherfolk near the harbour, and the drums of janissaries coming close.

Fox stood against the moon, amongst the dead, and he grinned like a dog.

"Thus," said he, "do Christians pay their ransoms."

There was but little time left to launch the galley. The armies of the bey were marching, they were battering on the gates, there was shooting from the cannon in the battery to the north. Fox rallied his men who were running helter-skelter, not knowing where to turn. He shouted at them to rig the ship and to be yare about it. The city was afire with torches, rams were thudding on the gates, while the slaves tugged to slide the galley to the harbour, kicking aside the blocks, gasping on ropes. Fox in the moonlight, leaning on his sword, shouted orders, sending comrades scuttling for food, for water, for munitions, for sails, for oars, for arms.

A castle barred the neck of the harbour to the west and there was a fortress to the north, and both were manned, both were now bright with torches. The sea, turbulent in the wind, was smashed to foam as balls from cannon flounced into it.

"No ship can pass through that!" cried Wickney, aghast.

Fox glared at him. Friends had brought Peter, and he had been trying to tend the dying man who lay beside the bodies of Tipton and Saltinstall, both dead in the grip of gold.

"Our ship will pass," said Fox. He leaped to his feet, chin out-thrust at Wickney who started back; all bloody was Fox because of his wounds that dribbled to the sand, yet he stood erect as if unscarred. "Was not the Red Sea impossible for the Israelites?" he cried; "was it not impossible for the walls of Jericho to fall without mines or rams? Such are the impossibilities that God loves. He That held the lion's jaws from rending Daniel asunder, can He not hold the roaring cannons of that hellish force? He That kept the fires raging in the burning oven yet made them harmless to the three children praising His name, can He not keep the shot from His elect?"

Wickney bowed and did not answer, but he bit his lip and his face was pale.

"Get ye to the ship!" cried Fox, and tenderly kneeling down lifted Peter, but the glaze of death was dulling Peter's eyes. "I told you not to touch that gold," mumbled Fox, "and now it is the death of you."

"Juan," whispered Peter, "I die . . . I nevah see Spain . . . nevah . . . not now, *padre mio* . . . that *senorita* . . . where ees Bessee?"

"She is not here," said Fox.

"No, Juan, please . . . I die . . . please, forgeev . . . Bessee. . . ."

Bessy was pressed against the wall of the bagnio, huddling in the shadows, when Francis took her hand and led, almost dragged, her to the dying man. She hid her face from Fox, turning her back on him, as she knelt over Peter who twisted a smile on his bloodied lips.

"Ah," said Peter, then stopped as blood bubbled into his beard. "I haf long dreamed . . . " he gasped, ". . . the weench at Avila . . . eet ees good to die . . . good, you are weench at Avila. . . ."

"Nay," sobbed Bessy, "you will not die, friend," and she leaned down as Peter tried to speak further, but the blood gushed suddenly, choking him, and he stiffened and his head slumped back, his mouth fell open and his body shook.

"He . . . he is dead," wailed Bessy.

"May God be with him," said Fox in a choking voice, "O, Peter, dear fool! why did you take that gold!"

"He has found gold more precious now," whispered Bessy.

"Amen," said Fox, and bowed his head in prayer. Then he seemed suddenly to realise to whom he spoke, for he sprang to his feet, glaring and muttering while Bessy cried:

"There is blood on you!"

"Better on my skin than on my soul," said Fox, "as on yours, red with the blood of Christ's wounds, bleeding on your scarlet wickedness. Why did you come to plague us, soiling God's work with the smear of your lusts?"

"Fox!" cried Francis, trembling, "one of us must die! God knows I have loved you like a father, but one of us must die unless you let Bessy come with us."

"She shall not come with us," said Fox.

"Then guard yourself," cried Francis, "and may God forgive us both."

Fox drew back, reluctantly raising his rusty sword, and reluctantly Francis lunged at him. Neither wished to hurt the other, for they loved one another, but there was naught else that they could do. Francis could not abandon Bessy, and Fox, although his heart was sick, could not go back on his years of hatred of his renegade child; he could not alter his words once they had been spoken and he had said that Bessy would not sail with them.

Now, both near to tears, these two men faced each other in the moonlight.

"O, son," cried Fox, "put up your sword!"

"Can Bessy sail?"

"Nay. . . ."

"Then guard yourself! I'll not warn you a second time."

"God forgive me," said Fox, and raised his sword.

They circled in the sand, their shadows dodging after them like devils waiting to snatch a soul. Bessy shrieked at them to stop, but neither dared look from the other's eyes, neither heard her shriek nor the shouts of comrades calling on them to stop. They looked into each other's eyes and crouched while they circled warily, swords out-thrust.

Blades jarred as Francis lunged, then sprang back. Fox did not move, save to shake his sword for guard. And still they glared unblinkingly, like animals before they pounce, their muscles taut. Friends cried about them, pleading with them to put up their swords, crying that the Turks were at the gates and that though the galley was launched, it was not stowed with necessary things. And yet these fools must fight! . . . Bessy cried to them to stop, for the love of God, stop. . . .

Unanswering, silent, the two circled slowly, churning the sands with their heels, and neither dared to blink. But Francis was young and impatient. His arm strained against his will and his fingers itched on the grip, so he sprang forward, slashing quickly: but not so quickly as Fox, for he had read the coming action in Francis's eyes, had sensed it in the hitch of his shoulder, and he sprang aside while almost with the same gesture, sobbing to God, he brought down his sword.

"May God forgive me," he moaned as Francis fell, "but you all know this fight was not my causing."

None answered him, they stood in silence, heads down, and Fox felt their reproach in their silence. It was the antagonism of the pack that dares not howl upon its leader, and he sensed it and trembled before it, not with fear but with the lust to justify himself.

"He would have brought the enmity of God on us," he cried, "loading our ship with sins too great to carry. Fellows, you know I loved this man. Can you not understand that rather than hurt him I longed to cherish him like my own son? He forced the fight on me. I only struck in self-defence!"

No one answered until Bessy, weeping on the body of Francis, fumbling in his blood for his heart, looked up to snarl.

"Murderer!" she cried. "Not content to torment me, you must kill him whom I love! Until I die I'll curse you. I know not what a daughter's curse be worth, but it is on you, murderer!"

"Silence, whore!" cried Fox, "this is your doing."

Crouch pushed through the men and knelt by Francis. He knocked Bessy aside as though he did not see her, then he lifted Francis in his arms and held him like a child. With raging eyes he looked on Fox.

"He is not dead," he said. "Thank your God for that, John Fox, for surely otherwise I would have slain you."

The men murmured and closed about Crouch and his burden and Fox stood alone, shaking and muttering, as they moved off. He

groaned and raised his face to the sky that glared down, fluttering with torn clouds in the wind. And he called on God to pity him whom men abandoned.

The knocking at the gate grew louder. John Fox shuddered like one slowly awakening from an awful dream and looked with blind eyes towards the knocking. Yea, they might turn their backs on him, for the prophets of God must know the hatred of those they save, and he remained in the moonlit yard, alone between them and the enemy. He, the trumpeter of Israel. . . . They were stowing food and munitions in the galley, they were making ready to depart, and the Philistines were upon them. He heard the bolts give in the gates, the wood crack and scream at snapping, and he shouted:

"Turn! turn! the devils are loosed!"

Those who had moved off with Francis and Bessy turned at his shout, and they saw the great gates sway; they drew their swords as Fox backed towards them. Crouch held Francis and tried to run and almost fell as men staggered into him, for clouds again blanketed the moon, and all was dark. But the sea could be glimpsed rippling ahead, and he took it for guide while other slaves ran into him, running to meet the enemy. He heard Bessy scream but could not pause for her.

"Bessy," whispered Francis, trying to struggle free.

Crouch did not answer but held Francis's shoulders the tighter while Will Wickney doubled his legs against his chest. Thus these two slipped and staggered to the harbour, gasping and kicking at those who got in the way, the wounded man between them. They could hear fighting behind them, shouting and the noise of guns, but they did not turn, not even when they heard Bessy scream.

Knocked over by some heavy shape running into her in the dark, she scrambled up to be knocked down again. She clutched at a man but he pushed her aside. None seemed to know what they were doing in that black confusion, while Fox with a group of comrades backed slowly, firing, backed towards her. She saw Fox and screamed but knew not where to run until she felt hands grip her, drag her along, while all the time she screamed.

Francis heard her screams and weakly struggled in Crouch's grip. Sick, and with hot pains clawing his shoulder, he yet could think of naught but Bessy in that melee, of Bessy trapped betwixt two enemies, the Moslems and her dad. But Crouch would not let him go; he waded through the water, then lifted his burden to willing hands in the galley. Even aboard the galley, Francis would not lie still, but twisted while his wound bled, and Crouch could not hold him from crawling to the bulwarks. He clutched the wood but was too weak to pull himself up, yet he cursed and spat at his friends, sobbing that he must get to Bessy, he must rescue Bessy. . . .

Water was under the ship, he felt it lift her, buoy her up as if weighing her in a great palm. Men were shouting, tugging at oars, pulling on ropes; while backing into the water, Fox and his comrades fought the Moslems. Fox held something heavy, something white was thrown over his left shoulder while he fought with the ancient sword in his right hand. Then he was at the galley and he lifted his burden to hands that caught it and laid it gently down; it sobbed on the deck, hiding its face.

"Bessy," whispered Francis, not daring to believe it her.

Slowly she turned and raised her head, moonlight glittering on her eyes as they gazed at him in wonder, as though afraid she dreamed.

"Francis . . . love . . ." she said.

She crawled to him and with hungry hands he caught her and drew her trembling to him. Then he saw Fox standing over him, legs apart as the galley lurched to the wind. Fox had saved her, why? he had brought her to him . . . was it a gesture of love or of contempt, as if to say: Take the wench, fool, she is not worth our quarrelling? Francis could not tell until he saw tears glisten on Fox's cheeks and saw the way he flinched, as if shy, when he realised that Francis watched him, while the smile fled his lips.

"Wickney!" shouted Fox, "here! a hand with me to the sweeps!" and he was gone, scrambling amongst the rowers to the stern to reach the whipstaff.

Francis drew Bessy to him and held her in both his arms crossed on her back and he took deep breaths of the salt air to calm his thudding heart while he grinned up at the moon that glared down whitely at him.

The fort was using its guns: they flared suddenly and roared and the sky seemed to shake like painted canvas; the castle answered, flaring whitely, redly, as balls bounced from either side, barring with scudding iron of death the harbour mouth. As the galley nosed closer to that mouth, the balls came nearer, rocking her as they split the water, plunging and whistling overhead, whining through the sails. The harbour-mouth was bright as day, lit by the continuous cannon-fire, as slowly, to the drag of oars, the galley nosed into the glare, the men holding their breath while they watched, feeling sweat freeze on their skins as every second drew them closer to where balls fountained the water, scarcely a foot, it seemed, of sea unbroken through which, with the help of God, they had to pass.

AFTERWORDS

The copie of the certificate for John Fox, and his companie, made by the Prior, and the brethren of Gallipoli, where they first landed.

We the Prior, and Fathers of the Covent of the Amerciates, of the city of Gallipoli, of the order of Preachers doe testifie, that upon the 29 of Januarie last past, 1577, there came in to the said citie a certaine gally from Alexandria, taken from the Turkes, with two hundreth fiftie and eight Christians, whereof was principal Master John Fox, an Englishman, a gunner, and one of the chiefest that did accomplish that great worke, whereby so many Christians have recovered their liberties. In token and remembrance whereof, upon our earnest request to the same John Fox, he hath left here an olde sworde, wherewith he slewe the keeper of the prison : which sworde we doe as a monument and memoriall of so worthy a deede, hang up in the chiefe place of our Covent house. And for because all things aforesaid, are such as we will testifie to be true, as they are orderly passed, and have therefore good credite, that so much as is above expressed is true, and for the more faith thereof, we the Prior, and Fathers aforesaide, have ratified and subscribed these presents. Geven in Gallipoly, the third of Februarie 1577.

I Frier Vincent Barba, Prior of the same place, confirme the premisses, as they are above written.

I Frier Albert Damaro, of Gallipoly, Subprior, confirme as much.

I Frier Anthony Celleler of Gallipoly, confirme as aforesaid.

I Frier Bartlemew of Gallipoly, confirme as above said.

I Frier Francis of Gallipoly, confirme as much.

The Bishop of Rome his letters in the behalfe of John Fox.

Be it knowen unto all men, to whom this writing shall come, that the bringer hereof John Fox Englishman, a Gunner, after he had served captive in the Turkes gallies, by the space of fourteene yeeres, at length, thorough God his helpe, taking good opportunitie, the third of Januarie last past, slew the keeper of the prison, (whom he first stroke on the face) together with foure and twentie other Turkes, by the assistance of his fellow prisoners: and with 266 Christians (of whose libertie he was the author) launched from Alexandria, and from thence arrived first at Gallipoly in Candie, and afterwardes at Tarento in Apulia: the written testimony and credite of which things, as also of others, the same John Fox hath in publike tables from Naples.

Upon Easter eve he came to Rome, and is now determined to take his journey to the Spanish Court, hoping there to obtaine some reliefe

toward his living: wherefore the poore distressed man humbly beseecheth, and we in his behalfe do in the bowels of Christ, desire you, that taking compassion of his former captivitie, and present penurie, you doe not onely suffer him freely to passe throughout all your cities and townes, but also succour him with your charitable almes, the reward whereof you shall hereafter most assuredly receive, which we hope you will afford to him, whom with tender affection of pitie wee commende unto you. At Rome, the 20 of Aprill 1577.

Thomas Grolos Englishman Bishop of Astraphen.
Richard Silleum Prior Angliæ.
Andreas Ludovicus Register to our Soveraigne Lord the Pope, which for the greater credit of the premises, have set my seale to these presents. At Rome, the day and yeere above written.
Mauricius Clement the governour and keeper of the English Hospitall in the citie.

The King of Spaine his letters to the Lieutenant, for the placing of John Fox in the office of a Gunner.

To the illustrious Prince, Vespasian Gonsaga Colonna, our Lieutenant and Captaine Generall of our Realme of Valentia. Having consideration, that John Fox Englishman hath served us, and was one of the most principall, which tooke away from the Turkes a certaine gallie, which they have brought to Tarento, wherein were two hundred, fiftie, and eight Christian captives: we licence him to practise, and give him the office of a Gunner, and have ordained, that he goe to our said Realme, there to serve in the said office in the Gallies, which by our commandement are lately made. And we doe commaund, that you cause to be payed to him eight ducats pay a moneth, for the time that he shall serve in the saide Gallies as a Gunner, or till we can otherwise provide for him, the saide eight duckats monethly of the money which is already of our provision. present and to come, and to have regarde of those which come with him, From Escuriall the tenth of August, 1577.

I the King.
Juan del Gado.

THE END

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